

The Crucial String by Nerdygeekalex

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Summary: Time is an interconnected web of strings. Tugging on one should pull on another on each end. Tug the right one with right amount of force; and the web unravels. It's 2023. Time travel is a reality. A time quake from 1983 wrecks the future. Two girls have to go in and fix this mess. OCs and maybe a few winks to the OG. Some MILEVEN and JANCY, hints of BYLER as friendship

1. Prologue

Disclaimer: I make no claim to the plots, materials, characters, and premises of the Terminator franchise nor of Stranger Things. Mitch and CJ are OCs; but this work may end up making references to brands I do not own, and to shows not on the public domain, like Full House, or Trollhunters.

A/N: This is a first work here in FFN. Since I saw it hasn't been tried before, and everyone I pitched it to expressed no interest in doing it. I decided to go ahead and do it myself. Please be kind as I'm doing this to refine my writing style before I proceed to make original work. Constructive criticism and comments will be greatly appreciated.

This is als a prologue chapter to gauge interest in this kind of story. I'll write the rest once I know enough people are interested in it to be worth giving up the rest of my Christmas break. Thanks for reading. I'll be preparing the next chapter for upload soon.

You will probably spot A TON of typos here and then. I apologize as I am one handed, which leads to a lot of those unfortunately. Those of us with disabilities have to make do the best as we can.

November 6, 2023

Time is an interconnected series of strings. Tugging one string will pull the two endpoints it is attached to; tugging another will do the same. It used to be that past was past. We in the present had no way of undoing strings tied by past events. The invention of the time machine in 2033 changed all this. A sudden rush to the past happened as people rushed to undo their regrets, and get their second chances.

At first, this was harmless; history hardly cared if you changed your major to computer science, or invested early in Google stock after changed a month ago hen a massive "timequake" was detected. Not long after, hordes of super powered individuals quickly overthrew governments across Europe and the Americas. Apparently, somebody had found that crucial string whose unraveling caused a large section

of the web to collapse and tugged hard at it, pulling the entire future down with it. One moment, modern civilization was peacefully humming along; the next it was being overrun by thousands of otherworldly monsters quickly identified as 'demogorgons' and 'demodogs.' With these creatures seemingly impossible to kill; and militaries ill-equipped to deal with them, much of the world quickly succumbed to the onslaught. Big cities like London, New York, and Chicago fell; as did smaller cities like Indianapolis, Gary, and Des Moines. From fallen regions emerged human soldiers seemingly controlled by a hive mind. With the Battle for Earth quickly turning south, humanity's last hope gathered in a small pocket in Northern Indiana where the last time machine still in human control could be found. As soldiers rushed to delay the oncoming onslaught for as long as possible, calculations pointed that the source of the "timequake" was November 1983, near the edge of the 50 years that safe time travel was supposedly possible. A theory was quickly agreed upon by experts and an expedition, humanity's last desperate hope, the expedition was quickly being outfitted.

The quartermaster was busy preparing a visibly unhappy Michelle.

"Take this pill; it will provide you with time protection in 1983" the quartermaster said.

"Why would I need it?" The nervous raven-haired, 12-year old asked.

"Because even the smallest change in 1983 in close proximity to your would-be parents can result in some consequences for your health. Think of it as the biological version of the big protection generators protecting this facility from the aftereffects of time manipulation. Simply put, if the Mind Flayer's agents kill anyone in 1983, you might feel the aftershocks or even disintegrate. This pill will keep you aware of your mission, protect you from time manipulation, and should last the one week necessary to complete your mission in 1983."

"Wait! One week? Why would it take so long?" A second girl asked. CJ was Michelle's cousin. She was about 14-years old, with shoulder-length, brown hair. "Mitch, you promised me all we need to do is make sure the most critical series of meet cutes in history happen then everything is peachy; now, I find out it's gonna take a darned

week? I ain't got time to spend a week shipping people!"

The quartermaster answered. "Well, Carrie Joy, it's actually two things: first you have to set them up; then you have to keep them alive for as long as history needs them to be to maintain its assumption here is that the Mind Flayer now knows how big a threat Eleven will become to it the moment she meets Mike; and it will keep coming until it neutralizes this threat."

"Fair enough." CJ conceded. "But why are you sending a bunch of middle-schoolers born four decades after the eighties; and who have never known a world before the Internet to undertake such a critical mission in the 80s? I mean I don't know what either of us will do without Netflix for a week"

The quartermaster was silent for a moment exchanging glances with Michelle, who promptly took over the job of explaining. "I hate to break this to you, Ceej; but it's more like no Internet for a decade, then no Netflix for two. We don't exactly have a return plan so this is more of a one-way trip."

CJ took a moment to reflect on this; then promptly exploded on her cousin. "WHAT THE HELL, MITCH? YOU'RE TELLING ME MY LIFE IN THE 2030S IS OVER IN EXCHANGE FOR A BARBARIC 20TH CENTURY EXISTENCE?"

"Well, you agreed." Mitch calmly responded.

"UNDER FALSE PRETENCES!" CJ countered.

"I asked you if you wanted to go to the past to save Mike and Eleven. You said yes before I even finished that sentence. Not my fault you got the wrong impression." Michelle said.

"NOWHERE IN THAT FREAKING SENTENCE DID YOU MENTION IT WAS A ONE WAY TRIP!" CJ screamed back. "BESIDES. WHY SHOULD IT BE ME?"

"You've been obsessed with the late 20th century ever since you first watched that darned Netflix documentary Stranger one knows more about Hawkins and Eleven than you do. I'm gonna need you to

survive back then if we do this. Besides, I doubt Netflix is going to release a new season of Troll Hunters any time soon if we screw this up." Michelle said.

The quartermaster added to this explanation "There aren't exactly a lot of alternative to you two. Mitch is the only one with combat capabilities without 21st century technology; and you're the only one who knows 20th century well enough to help her back in 1983. The Mind Flayer has practically eradicated almost everyone outside our pocket; and, while not ideal, you two are the best we have available. All our grizzled soldiers are already fully committed fighting off the demodog hordes outside this facility."

"Demodogs. Pfft. that's a stupid name." CJ said.

"HEY! Watch it! It makes sense." The quartermaster said.

"One last thing." CJ interrupted. "Why go all the way back to 1983 when we can just go a few months ago to uninvent the time machine?"

"If we use the Time Machine to prevent the invention of the Time Machine, we create a time paradox. Those are unpredictable but the effects should be similar to this time quake we're trying to prevent." The quartermaster said. "Good luck out there! We're all counting on both of you."

Mitch carefully led CJ to the time machine. If anything, this mission was not just about saving the world; it was also about preserving both of their existences. This was not her first rodeo; she knew Time travel sucked. There was the nausea, the disorientation, and the part where you arrive with no clothes on. On top of that, there was the weight that went with knowing the fate of the whole world rested on their shoulders. They were humanity's last gasp. Mitch heaved a sigh, asked herself what her father would do, before a voice inside her assured her he would totes be fine with making the sacrifices she was about to make.

One moment she was in 2033; the next, she was in 1983. Now, it was time to get to work.

A/N: Hope you enjoyed this. Don't worry if it feels incomplete. I plan on filling in the gaps as I write more chapters. In the next chapter, our heroes will be meeting Joyce because what kind of Stranger Things time travel story would it be without starting with The Vanishing of Will Byers?

Tell me what questions you'd like succeeding chapters to answer; or if you want more chapters. I'll be writing as much as I can until early January then upload pre-written chapters on a schedule after that. Speculation is welcome in the comments.

2. Chapter 1 - Arrival

A/N: So here's Chapter 1. We are now really gonna start tugging on some strings. So I'm planning that each chapter will focus on one of my OCs and an established character just so I can also play with character dynamics in ST. In the chapters I've written so far, though, I haven't really focused too much on established characters because those are about people I don't really care much about. Here you go with chapter 1. As I said, I look forward to your comments.

NOVEMBER 6, 1983

It was not long after they arrived in 1983. It was in moments like these that Michelle remembered just how annoying her cousin, CJ could be. Ever since they arrived in 1983 an hour ago, CJ began listing her complaints about being dragged unexpectedly to 1983. They managed to steal some clothes off a clothesline just outside Hawkins town.

"I had tickets to see Hamilton during the weekend, Mitch. Do you know how hard those were to get?" CJ griped, as though the touring cast could've possibly survived the horde of demodogs that was thrashing Chicago back in 2033;

"I have no Hamilton; I have no cell signal;. no Instagram no Netflix; and these clothes we stole are tacky! IT'S A DAMNED NIGHTMARE!" CJ just wouldn't stop.

It was at this point that Mitch, not a paragon for levelheadedness to begin with, finally lost her patience for her cousin's whining. "OH SOMEONE'S GOD, CEEJ. CAN YOU JUST BE QUIET FOR A MINUTE?"

"Guess what, Michelle! The world doesn't revolve around you! You can't trick somebody into a one-way trip fifty years away from everything they know; and expect things to be all peachy! Isn't 'FRIENDS DON'T LIE' kind of your family thing?"

As mean-spirited as that last part was, there was a lot of truth to it.

Mitch decided to defuse the rising tensions by shutting her trap, not exactly the easiest thing to do. The mission was just too important; and CJ was far too critical to it; to risk endangering over a dumb argument.

CJ, apparently, reached the same conclusion too; because the next thing to come out from her was actually a very important point. "Ok, boss lady. Now that we're in 1983, what's our next order of business?"

"We need to get to the corner of Maple and Cornwallis. There's one thing that absolutely has to happen tonight near that place." Mitch replied.

"Ok, I don't know where that is; but I have a pretty good idea where we can ask." CJ said while pointing to the one establishment that was open along the street they were currently on.

MEDVALD'S GENERAL STORE

Joyce Byers was used to working the night shift; and working this late usually meant entertaining a bizarre cast of clientele. It was usually town drunks like her infamously unrestrained ex-husband; but tonight, it was a pleasant, if curious, pair of young pre-teen girls. One had shoulder-length brown hair with light-colored eyes, while the other had jet-black hair framing her round, freckled face that was adorned with a pair of deep brown eyes. They were both wearing clothes that clearly did not see the back of a flatiron before being taken from a clothesline; and being worn.

The girls hurried in front of her. The one with brown hair elected to speak first. "Good evening, Ma'am! we're sorry to bother you; but we are kind of lost. Would you happen to know where Maple Street meets Cornwallis?"

This was a curious question as the place in question was, of course, empty wilderness; but years of working as a store clerk have taught Joyce not to ask questions she might not want the answers to.

Discretion being the better part of valor, Joyce set aside any misgivings she might've had and decided to be helpful; but not before selling the two girls a pair of flashlights with the necessary batteries.

"Come to think of it.... I've never seen you two around here before." Joyce said.

Both girls appeared to scramble for an answer; but the raven-haired girl finally managed to stammer out a reply that Joyce could believe. "Oh, we're not from here. My sister and I are from Indianapolis; and our family is having a camping trip in the woods."

"Joyce repeated the directions she gave the girls and added a long list of precautions.

The brown-haired girl did not appear to appreciate this as she remarked. "Geez lady, alright... you sound like our grandmother." The raven-haired girl appeared to throw her a glare for this before adding. "I'm sorry. Thank you so much for being helpful; I believe what she meant to say was that may your sons bear you many beautiful grandchildren who do not grow up to disappoint you."

This prompted the other girl to gently nudge the back of her head. Joyce laughed at the apparent sibling bickering. Will and Jonathan engaged in this kind of bickering after all, once upon a time. Kids grow up so fast. She went back to work without even noticing her two customers quietly hurry out of the store.

"SERIOUSLY?" Mitch screamed at CJ incredulously. "You couldn't have been more subtle?"

"I could ask you the same thing." CJ replied. "Besides, aren't we supposed to be preventing an apocalypse instead of trading barbs?"

Mitch accepted CJ's fair point and they continued their hurried rush toward destiny at the critical intersection of Maple and Cornwallis.

"Who are we supposed to be protecting there anyway?" CJ asked.

"the Demogorgon." Mitch replied.

"Wait. What?" CJ said.

"If we want to arrange the meet-cutes we came here to ensure, Will Byers is going to need to vanish tonight.

"The quartermaster compared records inside the facility's time shield with those from servers outside the time shield. Evidence points that the 'Timequake' was caused by Will Byers not vanishing." Mitch explained.

"Wait, so you want us to watch the Demogorgon attack Will Byers; and do... nothing?" CJ asked.

"Our instructions are actually to protect it while it does that." Mitch sheepishly replied.

They both arrived at the street corner to find... well.... nothing. There were no low, growling noises; no blinking lights; no monster. They just saw Will Byers speed his way past them without anything really happening to him.

Mitch, and CJ blinked in disbelief.

"Well, it looks ;like we're gonna have to take matters in our own hands." Mitch quipped, darkly.

CJ just put her palm on her face and sighed. It was going to be a long night.

A/N: Ok. I don't think I'm being subtle about who Mitch and CJ are at this point. To those who've already figured it out, please avoid spoiling in the comments. I ca probably upload on a once-a-week schedule. I promise chapters will be at least 1000 words EACH. I'm a Masters students so , full disclosure, I probably won't be able to continue after February. Happy Reading!

3. Chapter 2-The Vanishing of Will Byers

A/N: OK. I've finally worked out a publishing plan. I will write daily during the holidays then publish the chapters once a week starting today, January 1. The rest of the chapters will come as follows:

January 7- Chapter 3: Children of the Wheelers

January 14 - Chapter 4: Operation DESTINY

January 21 - Chapter 5: Shipping Trouble

January 28- Chapter 6: Regrets

February 4- Chapter 7: Coffee

February 11- Chapter 8: The Wheeler Protocol

February 18 - Chapter 9:The Monster

February- 25 Chapter 10: The Calm

March 4 - Chapter 11 - The Storm

March 11 - Chapter 12 - Goodbye

March 18 - Epilogue

Hey guys! I need people to review. Do people hate my story? Do you think my writing is terrible? Should I give up on this story? Do you have suggestions? I JUST REALLY NEED TO KNOW if it's affecting any of you. This is my first fic; so I don't know how things are supposed to work around here. I'm sorry if I sound entitled; but indifference is the opposite of love and all I'm really picking up is a heap of indifference. I just need a reaction. If I'm doing anything wrong, I would really appreciate hearing it at Chapter 2 instead of Chapter 10 seeing as I'll need to pre-write these chapters.

I also appreciate feedback on what I need to do to improve my

writing. I hate to beg, but I really need to know if I'm doing well. I can even accept hate because at least I now I made you feel something.

OUTSIDE THE BYERS HOUSE

"I hate you, Mitch." CJ said dejectedly as she came out from behind a tree covered in mud and leaves.

"You know I love you too, Ceej." Mitch, similarly said sweetly. "Now do the growl."

CJ replied with a hostile snarl more than a growl. he was just about done with her chipper cousin's antics.

"What's the point of this again?" CJ half-whined.

"Since the Demogorgon was apparently unavailable tonight, we will have to pull off the Vanishing of Will Byers by our pretty selves." Mitch said. "Do the growl again."

This time, CJ replied with a deep primal growl. One that communicated her exact sentiments to Mitch. Those sentiments said that she, CJ, could probably murder her, Mitch, now in 1983; and nobody would care enough for her, CJ, to get in any real trouble.

"Perfect. Just do that again when Will gets here later and we should be good to go." Mitch said, a little too cheerfully to please her now visibly annoyed cousin.

The said cousin was, by now, half plotting murder; and half restraining herself. Mitch seemed extra bossy here in the past; and she was way too cavalier about it to keep CJ happy. CJ and Mitch have been inseparable since childhood, CJ was to be the Barb to Mitch's Nancy. OK, that was probably not the best analogy; but CJ promised her mother that she would look after Mitch up to, and even beyond, the point of death just like the real Barb; and CJ had no intention of breaking that promise, no matter how much Mitch was just asking to be murdered.

The Vanishing of Will Byers should be a pretty straightforward affair. In the original timeline, Will Byers didn't disappear at the corner of

Maple and Cornwallis. He stumbled into Mirkwood, left his bike in the forest, then managed to make it home before the Demogorgon took him. In the absence of a decent Demogorgon to do the job, Mitch and CJ were to break into the Byers house, knock Will out, bring his bike back to Mirkwood, then find a suitable shed to hide Will Byers in until his disappearance had served its historical , right?

Not really. For an act of destiny, the meeting, and subsequent mating, of Mike and Eleven was less written in the stars; and more a product of a tedious series of bizarre, made-for-TV coincidences that Mitch and CJ had to meticulously arrange and time down to the precise second. This was a hard enough job under ideal conditions; but the Mind Flayer and its minions would also be working to actively sabotage their machinations every step of the way.

For now, CJ would have the pleasure of watching her clumsy cousin distract, then knock out the Byers dog so it wouldn't interfere with the plan.

For her part, Mitch was largely successful in accomplishing the task until she slipped on some mud then landed face-first on the ground, whereupon Chester, the Byers dog, set upon her. CJ, instead of laughing at her cousin's karmic comeuppance, decided to help Mitch before Chester could do too much damage. As Mitch was screaming in agony from the dog's bites, CJ managed to sneak behind Chester, and capture it using veterinary techniques she learned back in 2033. Thankfully, damage to Mitch was pretty limited, just a few scrapes and a couple of bites. This was enough to render her useless for the plot to 'vanish' Will Byers, however, so she bandaged Mitch up , using medical supplies commandeered from the Byers first-aid kit; and placed her somewhere out of the way, namely the Byers tool shed.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Will arrived to a dark, quiet house. His mother and brother were nowhere to be slowly entered his house. He stepped on some sticky puddle that was un the foyer for some reason; but continued on since he was unable to see in the dark.

It was then that he heard the dark growl outside his house. This scared him enough to check all the locks then hole up to attempt to

call for help. It didn't take long for the locks to break. As Will curled up in a corner of the Byers living room, he heard footsteps approach him. A small figure stood over him as he whimpered in desperation. This figure poured a small amount of something liquid on him. Will, wet and sticky, tried to sigh in relief as the figure calmly walked away.

His hairs on his back began to stand back up again when the deep low growl he had heard earlier returned and began to move closer. With sweat pouring like buckets from all the fear that had built up in his system, Will built up the kind of resolve that one could only get from a long friendship with Mike Wheeler; and he resolved that if this were to be his end, he would go down fighting instead of cowering in his living room.

He made a quick sprint to his backyard shed. He prepared the shotgun his family stored there; and he braced for one final act of resistance, pointing the gun at the shed door. His efforts were complicated by the shed light glowing bright then exploding in a hail of sparks. His scream fell on deaf ears as the course of history took its victim.

MEANWHILE....

Outside, CJ shouldered carried an injured Mitch hurried away from the Byers house. CJ hated the idea of leaving Will to the Demogorgon; but it had to be done. Will Byers had to vanish tonight; and they had a meet-cute to arrange tomorrow. CJ, thinking quickly, after Chester injured Mitch, collected some of her blood before dressing her wounds. She wasn't sure if the demogorgon would be drawn to this blood so if it hadn't attacked Will; but she took the actions necessary to offer an alternative target to the relentless monster. Tonight was not the night CJ would break her promise to her mother to always look after her cousin, Mitch.

"Remind me never to cross you." Mitch said. Mitch was usually the ruthless one in their relationship; but CJ could be ruthless too, if necessary, even if that ruthlessness meant screwing over Will Byers to accomplish their task.

"Believe me, if I felt I could do THAT to you, you would've been

Demogorgon food about an hour ago." CJ assured Mitch.

"Let's get out of here; we have a big day tomorrow." Mitch commanded.

"Hang on." CJ said as she grabbed Will's bike and began to roll it back into smiled sadly to herself now that the first step on the road to setting Mike up with Eleven was finally set.

Destiny was on Mitch and CJ's side; but it had an entire army of demogorgons, demodogs, one very pissed off shadow monster, and two dozen armed government agents blocking its way.

A/N: So yeah. Writing my OCs playing a more active role in Will's abduction by the Demogorgon was a bit painful for me; but it needed to be done, IMHO. I'd like to know your thoughts. :) I'm still a few chapters down; but pre-writing is going well. Hoping to hear your thoughts. If yu have complaints/constructive criticism, I'd love to hear them before I finidh pre-writing.

4. Chapter 3 - Children of the Wheelers

A/N: Thank you for sticking with me so far. I'm just glad people are genuinely interested in the products of my imagination.

I need to acknowledge my friend, BCI603. Not only are her stories such a delight to read (I highly recommend them); she has also been pretty supportive of my efforts to write for the FFN community. Without her encouragement, and her occasional advice, your eyeball may never see this story.

I'd like to add a note on my publishing schedule. My time zone is GMT + 8. For most of you, my chapters will update a day BEFORE I promised them. For those in Asia, chances are you'll see the chapters on the day I promised.

I hope y'all enjoy this chapter.

BENNY'S BURGERS; NOVEMBER 7, 2018

CJ watched the diner carefully while laying low. Joyce Byers could already identify her as being near Mirkwood on the night of Will Byers' disappearance, leading Mitch and her to decide on splitting up as to be less recognizable; it would not do to have a second witness placing her in Benny's diner knowing what was about to go down. She watched the back door; and calculated the distance between it and the drainpipe of destiny. CJ liked Eleven; she was a badass, like all of CJ's personal heroes. Watching the legendary Eleven walk into the back door of Benny's diner would easily count as the second most surreal experience of her life, second only to having travelled to 1983 to be able to witness it.

CJ didn't need to watch the events inside, she already knew the details. Her only concern was to get this girl out of there tonight; and into the waiting flashlight of one Mike was another legend, an ordinary boy whosomewhat managed to seduce one of the most powerful telekenetics ever into actually loving him. CJ had always wondered what he was like; but she and Mitch had agreed that Mitch was to handle that piece of the equation.

She watched carefully as a child with a buzz cut in a hospital gown entered through the rear entrance. CJ be required on Mitch's part assumed this was Eleven. The events of the next twelve hours would be pretty well-known: easily summarized as "Connie Fischer kills Benny Hammond." CJ hated this part of this mission; or the part where she knew something bad was going to happen but would otherwise have to watch and let it happen in order to preserve the course of history.

The idea of doing nothing to prevent tragedies went against the very core of CJ's being. Mitch didn't like it either; but Mitch was also taught from youth that some evils were necessary to prevent bigger ones. CJ did not get that memo; but she would try her best to resist every impulse to disregard it. As Mitch kept insisting, the stakes were too high to let personal objections cloud their judgments.

HAWKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL

The American public school system was something of a curiosity for Michelle. She had gone to specialized education programs almost her entire life. She was not used to going without the sound of at least five different languages spoken across the whole day; but today she did. Today, she successfully stalked the famous "Party."

She heard their terrible Australian accents in the AV Club; she heard them summoned to the Principal's office for questioning about the whereabouts of Will Byers; and she heard Mike Wheeler almost immediately make plans to violate the one instruction of his future father-in-law. Mitch smiled at this; this party of nerds had been her heroes ever since she learned to talk. Her mother would never shut up about Mike Wheeler and "the Party;" and neither would her immediate relatives who all seemed to remember him fondly. Mitch quietly eavesdropped on the group, secretly scanning the school. At the rate Mike was going, it definitely seemed like destiny, for once, was finally on their side; not much effort would be required on Mitch's part to make sure Mike's appointment with destiny goes exactly as history intended it.

This comforted Michelle a lot for this was not just any ordinary mission for Mitch. Mitch is actually Michelle Leonora Hopper Wheeler, the youngest daughter of Michael Wheeler and Jane

Hopper. Today was the first time she has seen her father in the flesh; and tonight will be the night she witnesses her parents meet for the first time. Mike had died shortly after Mitch was born; and Eleven did her best to put him on a pedestal for young Michelle until such a point that Mitch adored, and practically worshiped the late Mike Wheeler. This adorable young nerd had no idea of what destiny has meant for him tonight, a destiny Mitch would be ushering him to meet.

This is not to say that Mitch did not nurse any resentments at her would-be father for dying on her before she was even old enough to meet him. Mitch had spent most of her life without a father; and the little shit in front of her seemed like he needed more parenting than she did. Perhaps she'd settle her life-long fristrations with him eventually; but the number one rule of time travel is NO SPOILERS. There was no surer way to change the past than giving its actors knowledge of the future. Mitch knew that; and so her conversation with Mike Wheeler would need to wait for later; if it were to come up at all.

BACK AT BENNY'S

CJ was nothing if not crafty, she was still operating within the limits of Mitch's "Do Nothing" Rule; but she was now preparing a nasty surprise for the lab soldiers when they arrived. CJ would not prevent hem from performing their historical roles of killing Benny and smoking Eleven out; but she could make sure the lab pays a heavy price for tonight.

married While it can be argued that she was breaking the rules. CJ reasoned that she couldn't be expected to sit around doing nothing for twelve hours. She had only accepted the job of staking out Benny's because Mitch clearly needed to process her daddy issues more than CJ needed to not be bored. CJ scavenged outside the diner for spare parts and materials; then she MacGyver-ed a few improvised traps for the lab's men. A few IEDs later; and she was good to go. CJ had Wheeler blood; and her mother, Nancy, taught Carrie Joy Wheeler Byers that doing nothing in the face of the world's injustices was, to use Nancy's words, bullshit. CJ's father, Jonathan, a mellower Byers, disagreed. CJ's was more about not starting fires she couldn't put out; or burning her ass if she couldn't bear to sit on the

blisters. It should come as no surprise that her parents often end up arguing over parenting. CJ's cool with that though as her parents are somehow still happily and doing better than Mitch's since neither Jonathan nor Nancy shared the impulsive, self-sacrificing, self-destructive tendencies of one Mike Wheeler.

Nancy, ever the devoted older sister, would task her youngest child, CJ, with looking out after the young daughter, Mitch, who would grow up never knowing her father' CJ became her cousin's keeper.

A/N: So yeah, I've decided to stop pretending and just flat out remove the mystery around Mitch and CJ's parentage. Plot twists are overrated; and it was going to compromise the quality of the story if I didn't make the full emotional stakes explicit.

My apologies to those who wanted to keep guessing. I hope you appreciate the pay-off of my decision.

Anyways, I would love to hear your thoughts about my story. In particular, if you think I can improve on my writing and how.

5. Chapter 4- Operation DESTINY

A/N: So here the fic begins to merge with the plot of Strannger Things, I apologize to anyone bothered by my departure from actual events. It was sort of important to me that this fic be more than a retelling of events you already know. Please enjoy; and you know, review.

To paraphrase The Producers: "If you like my fic, tell everyone; but if you think it stinks, send me a PM but otherwise keep your trap shut.

WHEELER HOUSE, MAPLE STREET

Assuming CJ does everything perfectly on her end, Mitch would have two responsibilities:

- 1.) get Mike and the Merry Band (Party) of Nerds to, and from Mirkwood safe and unhindered; AND, most importantly,
- 2.) do this within the timetable she and CJ agreed upon.

The second part is particularly crucial as Fate apparently operates on a tight schedule; and it refuses to divas who don't come precisely on time. If either Mike or Eleven arrives just a few seconds too late or too early, Mileven, as historians call them in 2033, would become one big missed connection, and Mitch would disappear from history.

Surprisingly enough, Mitch wasn't as alarmed at the thought of her disappearing from history as she was at the idea of all lives hanging on such thin threads held together by coincidences.

Before getting started on actually tackling the philosophical issues surrounding time; Mitch first had to deal with a real obstacle in the way of destiny: her overbearing grandmother, Karen Wheeler. Mitch didn't think that Karen was a terrible person; it was just that he current doting on her children might prevent Mike from meeting his destiny.

To remedy this, Mitch decided that, *faute de mieux*, she would have to

use her powers. She waited for Karen to put her Aunt Holly to bed, telekinetically opened the kitchen window; then she snuck in through the said window. She went for the coffee pot; then she poured something she had stolen from the Hawkins Middle School clinic, a mild fast-acting sedative. This took only five minutes and Mitch was gone before Karen returned to pour herself and Ted some coffee. 15 minutes later, both were out like a light. Operation DESTINY was free to proceed.

With her would-be grandparents out of the way, Mitch could return to her vigil, and to waiting for Mike and his friends to emerge from the Wheeler basement. It was then that she heard the distinctive and unmistakable growl that indicated the presence of a nearby demodog. Yeah, Mitch had to agree with CJ that saying it did sound stupid.

Apparently, the Mind Flayer had shifted strategy and was now trying to deal with its Eleven problem directly. Mitch quietly hoped CJ would be ready to handle this problem on her own as she braced herself to deal with the Demodog in her vicinity. It emerged from the bushes mere meters away from the Wheeler House. Mitch pounced and used her telekinesis to crush its brain and throw it aside before it could make enough noise to scare the Party out of its planned night search; or alert Nancy upstairs. Mitch was pleasantly surprised to witness the arrival of Steve Harrington, her favorite would-be godfather, as he got off Tommy's car and proceeded to climb up the Wheeler house. She quickly hid herself when she heard Mike and the Party sneak out the basement on their way to meet destiny in Mirkwood. Mitch decided to try and run ahead in case trouble was afoot in Mirkwood.

-

BENNY'S DINER, near MIRKWOOD

CJ cringed when she heard the growl of a demodog surrounding the diner. This was a complication she was not ready to deal with. Luckily, the lab soldiers arrived before the Demodog could become her problem. CJ quietly thanked whatever power had timed their arrival this way as Destiny finally appeared to be cooperating with her in some way. CJ heard the gunshot that would indicate that Connie had finally killed Benny. As the soldiers rushed into position to capture Eleven; CJ decided now would be time to detonate the

"mines" she had prepared for the "bad men." Eleven wouldn't need much help from her in order to escape so CJ could focus on being as big a pain for Martin Brenner as humanly possible. As she spotted Eleven make a run for the drainpipe to meet Destiny, CJ decided to distract the soldiers by blowing up the mines she had prepared to surprise them. Four IEDs, made from recycled junk and discarded cooking supplies blew up, sowing enough chaos to let Eleven get away as the lab lost four white vans in a small conflagration that would soon be quelled by the coming thunderstorm.

MIRKWOOD

Mitch was waiting nearby in Mirkwood when she heard the explosions. She took this as a sign that

a.) Eleven was on her way; AND

b.) CJ had bent the rules again, like a true Wheeler.

She put her face on both palms at the latter thought then, as if to reflect her mood, it began to rain. Mitch now saw Mike, Lucas, and Dustin rush to the clearing, apparently attracted by the sound of an explosion (*Because this is Mike F&king Wheeler we're talking about*, Mitch thought) A bush rustled next to Mitch, attracting the attention of the three boys. Then and there, with rain pouring loudly, Mitch witnessed her two parents stare into each other's eyes for the first time, starting history's most important love story.

She was too caught up in the moment to notice the rustling of the bush next to her as a figure made its way next to her.

"Honestly, I'm kind of underwhelmed." Mitch heard CJ startled the dignified CJ with a response.

"With what?" Mitch asked.

"With your dad. I came a full 50 years into the past expecting to meet a DILF; and the universe presents a frog instead." CJ said.

Mitch cringed and stared at CJ in disbelief.

"You mean to tell me you came here to 1983 expecting to flirt with

your uncle?" Mitch asked.

In a rare moment, CJ decided to zip her mouth. CJ's disgust was visible even in the dark so Mitch added a parting comment. "Yeah, I thought so."

Mitch went back to observing her parents. Her deep-seethed daddy issues aside, Mitch was a romantic who could appreciate the sight of Destiny working its magic on two people it has decided to join. Maybe Mike was a frog, as CJ suggested; but doesn't the frog turn into a prince once the princess kisses it? Mitch watched as Mike placed his jacket on Eleven's back and made ready to return home. Mitch took this as her cue to follow them in case the Mind Flayer's minions were lurking on the way back.

The set-up was complete. Now, both Mitch and CJ were counting on Mike Wheeler to work whatever charm he could muster to finish the job .

A/N: Here you go. I can end right here as the main conflict is sort of resolved; but there's 50 years worth of events between here and where we started so I hope you don't mind if I continue.

QOTF: Do y'all think I have stuff I can improve on?

6. Chapter 5 - Shipping Problems

A/N: I have to admit this isn't as good as I wanted it to be. A lot of ritters have written Mileven so we, IMHO, that I can't possibly compare myself to them. Lookin at you, Cali-chan, Calpurnia09, Magladin, Usiel21, etc. You guys do good work.

OUTSIDE THE WHEELER HOUSE

Mitch was anxious.

Mike meeting Eleven in on a rainy night in November 1983 was destiny; but Eleven and Mike falling for each other would still take work on their part. CJ was just not convinced the awkward frog prince they were stalking observing was up to the task; and her lack of faith was ribbing off on Mitch.

"What if they don't hit it off?" Mitch asked.

"Relax, Mitch. . they don't need to fall in love today. " CJ tried to reassure her. "What, were you expecting to be conceived tonight?"

"No." Mitch's defeated sigh was automatic at this point until she realized she couldn't get the idea CJ had just planted out of her head. Damn her annoying cousin.

"What? No! Ewwwww. Gross!" She gave a stronger negation as her cousin just laughed. There was probably no way those string of words had ever been uttered before to describe anything. She then considered CJ's position.

What if Mike and Eleven weren't as destined for each other as people in the future made them out to be? What if this required more work on her part? Was shipping her parents here in the past something that was really under her control?

THE WHEELER BASEMENT

Mike Wheeler was carefully considering the predicament he was faced with. On the one hand, harboring a strange girl in his basement was definitely something that would be guaranteed to send Karen

Wheeler on a long fit; on the other hand, turning away a stranger in need was precisely the kind of moral action Mike's moral compass could not tolerate. Lucas was not wrong; there was indeed the possibility that she could be some sort of serial killer, or escapee from the nearby loony bin. However, he could not look at this girl's eyes and see any malicious intent that would justify turning her out in the cold November rain.

It was clear Lucas had a good point; but Mike understood they couldn't just tell his parents just yet due to all the rule-breaking involved. In the end, Mike got Lucas to agree that the best action was to wait for one night; then have the girl come around and approach his mom the next morning.

Lucas had a lot of problems: an annoying little sister, English homework he did not understand, a stubborn best friend who won't listen to reason, etc.; but he definitely won't be allowing a strange girl Mike found in the middle of the rain to become one of them. His friend was obviously heart-set on making a terrible ill-advised decision, as Mike Wheeler seemed pathologically predisposed to do. Lucas swore to the high heavens that Mike would never make it through puberty if left only to his own judgment; and that proclivity for poor judgment was compounded by his also pathological stubbornness that closed him off to any attempt to check his impulsiveness, and so Lucas had to provide, an often unwelcome, voice of reason. If looking out for Mike made him a bad guy.; then so be it. It was better for Mike to hate him than it was for Lucas to just let Mike do something stupid.

Lucas thought it was crazy to simply let a stranger into one's home; he wouldn't. It took some work; but Mike was thankfully not as stubborn about this as he normally was in their other spats. Mike proposed to meet him halfway by having the girl knock at the front door the next day and Lucas, glad to see Mike acknowledge his position for once, accepted

With this disagreement partially settled; and with no point in continuing to argue the issue until the next day, Lucas decided to relent and go home with Dustin in tow.

Mike didn't even wait for Dustin and Lucas to leave before making the strange girl feel at home. He set her up in a cozy blanket fort.,

missing the eye roll Lucas threw at him as he handed her a fresh set of blankets.

Mike had fully expected to follow the terms of his compromise with Lucas since friends don't lie, after all; he didn't expect much to come out from asking for her name. It would turn out that her name was just the first of an endless list of things he would ask her for. She gave it to him this time, like the other million times that would follow.

Eleven was not exactly sure what to make of this boy. Surely, nobody was this nice just for the sake of being nice. Yet, here this boy was doing everything he could to make her feel safe and warm. He wasn't using her just because of powers he didn't know she had; he was just being kind. This was a new type of person for Eleven; and she rightly felt suspicious. The boy then did something nobody had ever done before: he asked for her name. She didn't have one; but thought whatever Papa called her, no matter how unsatisfactory, would have to do.

"Eleven" She said.

"As in the number?" he asked, taken aback by her unconventional answer. "I'm Mike Short for Michael; maybe we can call you El, short for Eleven." he said. This proposal made Eleven feel warm, Never before had someone called her by anything other than her number. As a final touch, he even wished her goodnight on his way up which prompted Eleven to reply with her own 'Goodnight, Mike.'

ELSEWHERE

CJ left Mitch, who was snooping on guarding her would-be parents, alone to focus on her own issues. For one, she was really jealous of Eleven right now. No, not in that way. You see, Eleven got to stay warm indoors and sleep in a cozy basement. CJ, on the other hand, was stuck outside, in the cold rain, looking after a cousin doing totally not creepy stalking on her 12-year old would be parents. She thought hard. Why let this whole thing be all about Mitch? She was not going to be stuck 50 years in the past forever just so Mitch could set her parents up together. Mike and Eleven had met; Mitch should just go and let destiny take over at this point.

Surely, there must be something she could do to address her own issues. Then, it hit her.

CJ mouthed the answer. A single word. Barb.

A/N: OK, I think Justice for Barb is an overdone memetic mutation; but discussing her makes sense given the characters involved. I can't totally blame Mitch for snooping. Eleven stalked Mike for the better part of a year; and I'd be shipping so hard too if my parents were Mike and Eleven. I decided to add the Lucas POV because I think his character deserves a bit more elaboration. If I had a friend like Mike Wheeler, I'd also be extremely paranoid on their behalf.

7. Chapter 6 - Regrets

A/N: So this is the kind of chapter that can only be plausible in a time travel story. I honestly had a lot of fun writing this chapter. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it.

The big challenge of this story is often how to give it more depth. I kind of trapped myself into characters who can observe; but try to act as like as possible. That's not a recipe for a good story, so I have to get creative in telling this. I hope my creativity paid off here. At this point, your reviews won't affect my writing of this story much; but I'll still appreciate reading them; and they might be useful when I begin writing new stories.

HAWKINS HIGH SCHOOL; NOVEMBER 8, 1983

Boy, was her mother hanging out with the wrong crowd. CJ was none too pleased with Steve, who trying way too hard to please complete assholes like Carol and Tommy. Meanwhile, her would-be father, Jonathan was busy by his lonesome posting "Missing" posters of Uncle Will. *Well, at least he didn't become antisocial BECAUSE he met mom.* CJ became amused at the thought of her father being some sort of social butterfly.

If Mitch was going to fuss over Mike and Eleven all week, at least CJ could spend some time watching over her would-be parents. CJ and Mitch ensconced themselves at the famous Hopper cabin for now. The dusty old cabin wasn't the best place to sleep in; but it was better than lying outside in the rain when you were lacking a better option. They had not really slept since they first arrived in 1983.

For now, CJ left Mitch alone with her obsession about shipping her parents. She was not going to touch that land mine. Instead, she was watching her would be mother, her personal hero, disappoint her one way after another. CJ was really fond of the 2033 Nancy, the mother that had raised her; it was too bad that 1983 Nancy was turning out to be some confused adolescent who had zero resistance to peer pressure.

This was not necessarily a bad thing. CJ owed her very existence to the chain of events that would follow from her mother's one poor decision back in 1983 after all. It all hinged on the young woman CJ was looking at right now.

Much like Will needed to be sacrificed at the altar of Mike and Eleven, CJ had to make sure Barbara Holland got her worst and final week so that Nancy and Jonathan can become a thing. Barb would be the only fataalty of "The Week;" and it would o a solid psychological number on CJ's mother, Nancy. The moral problem was staring CJ back in the eyes: Let Barbara Holland die as history intended; or fix the one mistake that would haunt Nancy Wheeler for the rest of her life. CJ needed to consult someone; but Mitch would obviously say "let time happen" even as the hypocrite was busy shipping her parents. Everyone else would just find the idea of fixing the past, to use a 20th century term, cuckoo.

HARRINGTON RESIDENCE

CJ did not hate Steve Harrington. She really liked her Uncle Steve and often wondered what it'd be like had Nancy married this ostentatious jock rather than the reserved Jonathan Byers.

However, the Steve Harrington who was making the moves on her mother in 1983 was less the 'mother figure' her big nerds-for-uncles considered him to be; and more the infuriating jock stereotype that CJ loved cutting down to size back in 2033. To make things worse, he surrounded himself with revolting fools like Carol and Tommy, the kind of bad influences you don't want to see hanging around your future would-be mom.

Nancy's best friend, Barb, was the only one really looking out for her that night; and she was continually ignored the entire night. Eventually, 1983 Steve invited 1983 Nancy up to his room, to Barb's strenuous objections. CJ was 12; but she knew what that meant. Barb's pleas went unheard; but she didn't take her ball, or car in this case, and go home with it. No, Barb stood vigil outside the Harrington house waiting for a bad friend to walk out and realize the awfulness of her decision.

If I were in Barb's place, Mom would be in for one hell of an I-told-you-so

speech. CJ thought. Whatever Barb was waiting to do, CJ knew how this night is fated to end: not well. Barb will disappear tonight; it was only a matter of whether the Demogorgon will be there to do it or if CJ would have to do it herself.

CJ continued to watch, looking at the second floor window, where her would-be mother was visibly undressing, making CJ both cringe and stare.

Wow, Mom looked great! CJ thought. OK, that was not creepy at all. Her thoughts sarcastically remarked as she continued to gape at Nancy through the window.

YOU DAMN WELL BET IT'S CREEPY, CARRIE JOY! *A second voice screamed at her mentally. This was her conscience which eerily had her mother's, Nancy's, voice. You see, CJ was her mother's daughter so much that even her conscience had adopted the sound of her mother telling her off.*

YOUR PARENTS DID NOT RAISE YOU TO ACT LIKE SOME KIND OF CREEPY PERVERT! What is wrong with you, ASSHOLE? *Over time, this voice had captured Nancy's voice down to a T, and had approximated her tirades accordingly. This had also made it more annoying over time.*

I know, MindMom. Boy why can't you be in Mitch's head telling her off for stalking her parents. CJ thoughts replied to the haranguing conscience. WHAT THE HELL CARRIE JOY?! DON'T YOU DARE THINK BACK AT THE MENTAL REPRESENTATION OF YOUR MOTHER LIKE THAT! *The mental voice of her mother replied.*

YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF YOU BRING SHAME TO THE BYERS NAME. *the voice continued. It was at this time that CJ was saved by the sight of something odd happening behind the bushes near the pool.*

Wait, isn't that dad doing the exact same thing your reprimanding me for? *CJ thoughts said, mentally pointing at Jonathan Byers who was indeed taking pictures of the events in the Harrington House.*

FIRST OF ALL, IT's YOU'RE; SECOND, WHAT THE FUCK, JON!?

DON'T UNDERMINE ME WHEN I'M TRYING TO PARENT OUR DAUGHTER! CJ's MindMom was practically dripping with disappointment at both her 'daughter' and 'husband.' CJ also had a MindDad but, like the real Jonathan Byers, it usually preferred to be quiet instead of picking fights with the intractable Nancy Wheeler. This was not one of those usual times.

In my defense, I was looking for my missing brother; and you were the one cavorting with Steve Harrington while the Demogorgon abducted the loyal best friend you didn't listen to. MindDad replied.

You go, MindDad! CJ mentally thanked the mental voice of her father for momentarily quieting the mental voice of her mom.

Wait a minute. THE DEMOGORGON! CJ had forgotten about that. In a fleeting moment, the lights around the house blinked shut. Barbara Holland, loyal friend. disappeared forever, her last moment immortalized forever by Jonathan Byers' camera. CJ breathed a sigh of relief that she did not need to actively deliver Barb's fate this time. Barb's decision to stay behind and wait for her friend had cost her her life. The events that would lead to Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers meeting were now set in motion. CJ offered a moment of silence for the young woman to whom CJ owed her very existence.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

CJ decided to call it a night the moment Barb disappeared. Unlike Mitch, she knew when no more further intervention would be helpful on her part. As she left the Harrington residence under the cover of darkness, she spotted a figure standing next to a lamppost on the Harringtons' street.

CJ decided to investigate. It didn't take long for her to recognize this figure under the dim light of the lamppost. It was the adult Will Byers smiling at her. He approached her, extended a hand, and spoke.

"Can we talk?" he asked.

A/N: So what to discuss? What do you think of CJ's MindMom and MindDad? I figured it'd be fun to speculate on how Mileven and Jancy are as parents so I innovated with that to at least get

a version of them in this story.

The second half of this chapter was written AFTER the next two chapters so you might notice some inconsistencies. I didn't expect this to be more than a Barb chapter so I avoided writing this for some time.

Anyways, has my story been improving from my first chapter? Or do you guys feel it's falling flat?

8. Chapter 7 - Weeping Angels

A/N: So I made a Dr. Who reference. Honestly, I was surprised I avoided that for this long in a Time Travel story.

As I have mentioned in a previous note, I wrote this chapter BEFORE I finished the previous one. That unfortunately means no MindParents; not that they would've been useful here.

How is my story doing so far? I'd love to hear your thoughts.

CJ was sitting across from the older Wilt in a coffee shop at a secluded section of the Hawkins town center, intent on knowing what he had to say.

Her Uncle Will, a quiet man even by the taciturn standards of the Byers family, was CJ's favorite relative. His legendary BFF relationship with Mitch's dad set the tone for decades worth of Byers-Wheeler friendships that both families now worked conscientiously to maintain. He was withdrawn and rarely seen in public ever since the death of Mike Wheeler; but CJ loved his sensitive and artistic demeanor. She did not hesitate to oblige when he made a request to meet somewhere very private preferably somewhere he didn't know about.

The pre-teen CJ was not a fan of coffee; but this shop was the place that best met the parameters of her uncle's request.

"I'd expected to see a lot of people back here in 1983, you are probably not one of them," her Uncle Will said. He appeared to be experiencing some sort of eye strain, seemingly struggling to keep his eyes open.

"Why not?" CJ asked.

"Who were the two contenders during the 1988 Presidential Election?" Will asked.

"How the hell should I know?" CJ asked.

"Precisely," the older Will blinked

"Precisely what?" CJ replied

"You have no interest or aptitude for history." Will answered. "You have no idea what's going on; and why all this important." At this point, his eye strain was combining with some sort of furrowed brow.

"Hey! I DO TO!" CJ indignantly replied. Her Uncle Will cast his eyes down, looking sad for a moment; then he snapped them back up for a moment, a whole load of sweat was forming on his face. CJ thought her favorite uncle was acting weird.

Eventually, her uncle had to go to the restroom so CJ pondered for a moment. There were a ton of questions she wanted to ask that she suddenly remembered she still hadn't.

When her uncle came back, she was ready to find out what she wanted to know. Her Uncle Will was making a valiant effort trying to hold her gaze; but some kind of eye strain was clearly giving him difficulty. He appeared to have used the opportunity to wash his face.

"Why are you in 1983?" CJ asked.

"I arrived in Indiana moments after you had left 2033. I decided to follow the moment I found out. I'm betting you never heard of the Wheeler Protocol. If so, you came here unprepared." the older Will said.

"The Wheeler Protocol?" CJ asked. Her uncle had suddenly captured her interest.

"It's this plan your Uncle Mike made back in 2025. He was a big fan of Dr. Who. The idea of time travel fascinated him; so he made a detailed document outlining several contingencies should time travel be invented." his eyes snapped shut for a moment, as though deep in thought. He wiped sweat off his face for what was maybe the tenth time since he returned from the washroom. His lips curved up for a moment then he opened his eyes again.

"Speaking of which, CJ, weren't u a big fan of Dr. Who too? Weren't your favorite the one with those statues that sent you back in time?" Her uncle was talking excitedly.

"Yes." CJ answered. "Those weeping angels are hella creepy." It was at that moment that CJ's eyes widened in understanding and she smiled and nodded at her uncle.

The older Wilt relaxed for a moment then began the most interesting conversation of CJ's young life.

"Great!" he remarked. "Now, we can begin." he threw CJ this wide smile, as he sipped his coffee cup.

A/N: Oooh. I wonder what's going on. Just kidding! I know. If you notice any plotheoles, I apologize. I have a tendency to carefully plot out the overall structure of the story then just write details by the seat of my chapter was my shortest yet by a mile. I coylnd't think of a way to prolong it; and mot of the pay-off is in the next chapter.

9. Chapter 8: The Wheeler Protocol

A/N: So here you go. You may consider this as additional exposition. I realized I didn't really elaborate much on my premise so I took this opportunity to expand on backstory. You will also notice some Byler undertones. I don't ship them romantically; it's just that I feel Will plays a role in Mike's life that Eleven can't substitute for.

I eventually plan on writing stories highlighting the potential of the dynamic between Mileven as a romantic ship; and Byler as a friendship.

"Your Uncle Mike was probably the most brilliant person I ever met; but he never quite recovered from those 353 days in '83 and '84. He would spend the next four decades dedicating himself to your Aunt El's protection." The Older Will explained as CJ watched intently for his message.

"He worked decades at the CIA before he finally received a senior position in the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. " Will continued. "At DARPA, he was assigned to head Project Doctor overseeing various government-funded experiments involving time travel."

"As multiple projects neared completion, Mike became uneasy at the implications of time travel. Any rogue agent can cause irreparable damage simply by travelling back in time and altering some critical historical event." the older Will continued.

"In 2010, Project Doctor became Project Weeping Angel as it became clear that two-way time travel was impossible. Mike assembled the Party at Hawkins to discuss how to handle the inevitable coming of Time first question we discussed was whether the Mind Flayer could, theoretically, send someone back in time to change things. After an inevitable argument between Mike and Lucas, some unnecessary quips from Dustin, and an impromptu D&D campaign, we finally concluded this was highly unlikely as time travel would sever the connection between the Mind Flayer and its minion, killing the minion. " He finally concluded

"If it was impossible, how did the Mind Flayer manage to break time in the first place?" CJ asked

"We didn't say it was impossible; it was merely improbable." older Will replied. "Mike of course, was not cool with this uncertainty; and spent months writing a series of proposed regulations on time travel to make the prevention of that contingency more certain.: One, the government should allow the heavily regulated operation of only three time machines; two, one of those machines should be in a special time-shielded facility in Indiana under Mike's personal supervision; three, no time machine should have a power supply capacity allowing trips longer than fifty years back in time; four, it should time travel should not be allowed unless it obtains permission from a special board for a specific intended purpose. The government largely adopted these rules as the Wheeler Code." Her uncle Will added.

"It largely worked too; but Mike died the next year while investigating old MKUltra projects in Washington. His youngest child was born just mere months later." a tiny tear escaped and trickled down the older Will's cheek. "Frankly, I was surprised he made it to 50. Mike was always the type to stand up to his fears; even if those fears could kill him. It was only a matter of time before one of those actually did. I myself got possessed by the Mind Flayer when I tried doing that in '84." Will's tears flowed more freely now. CJ was suddenly finding some new found for Mitch's late father. However, she, seeing the anguish in her Uncle Will's eyes, began to fear for the day when it would be CJ in his place, mourning a Wheeler lost to suicidally stupid amounts of courage.

"Mike left the Party the Wheeler Protocols, a set of instructions on what to do just in case Time ever broke apart. The Party did its best to carry out those instructions in his absence; but we struggled without Mike." Will lamented. "For someone who couldn't bear losing anyone he cared for; your Uncle Mike was pretty cavalier about those who cared about him losing him. It was selfish of him; but it was the very essence of Mike-ness"

"What was in those protocols?" CJ asked.

"I honestly don't know." Replied her uncle. "the possibility of the

Mind Flayer possessing me again led Dustin to withhold information on the protocols from me.

CJ noted that he had nearly finished his message, so she decided to prolong the conversation until he was done.

"I'm sorry." CJ said.

"Sorry for what? " Her uncle asked.

"For letting the Demogorgon get you." CJ admitted.

"You were there? " the older Will asked, surprised.

"Yes. It was our mission to allow it to happen in order to protect history." CJ explained

"I was there when Mike laid down the rules of Time Travel. I understand that you had to do what you had to do." Will said, kindly. "All is forgiven; it's a fifty-year old bygone from where I'm standing." Will gave his young niece a smile, offering CJa hug.

CJ happily accepted the offer and ran into her uncle's open arms, happy that her apology went well. Uncle and niece exchanged a tearful embrace. CJ thanked her Uncle Will for his time and went on her way back toward the cabin where they had set up temporary residence. There was still much left of this week that CJ would need to navigate with Mitch.

CJ did not immediately go back to the cabin. She first went to the junkyard to cannibalize old things for spare parts. This girl's treasure was often in some bloke's trash. She and Mitch had been living some sort of barbaric 20th century existence since they arrived in 1983. Now, she was planning to change that.

A/N: As you may notice from subtle hints iin this chapter, I'm already considering the potential of this premise beyond this story. I did not consciously put those hints. I just realized they were there after I wrote this , it also means full pay-off fior this chpter ay have to wait until a sequel fic that may or may not happen depending on the response to this fic.

10. Chapter 9 - The Monster

A/N: This is a pretty long chapter. I got carried away in all the POVs. Anywayys, this is a pivotal scene in the series so I hope the length allowed me to give it justice.

OUTSIDE THE WHEELER RESIDENCE; November 13, 1983

Mitch was about to scream in frustration. Contrary to CJ's assurances that Mike and Eleven were going to be kept together by the sheer force of destiny, Mitch's would-be parents seemed resistant to the gravitational forces that were supposed to keep them together. For the second time in less than a week, Mike had yelled at Eleven again. Her would-be father was making a habit of verbally abusing her would-be mother; and that did not sit well with Mitch.

As the thin thread that her existence hanged on began to unravel, Mitch watched as her would-be mother robbed a grocery store of many boxes of Eggo waffles and walked out like a boss causing chaos and disruption along the way.

OK. Now I have something I can use the next time Mom tells me off for breaking the rules. Mitch thought., only to realize she was stuck 50 years in the past; and her new found *kompromat* was not necessary when she would be the same age as her mother for the rest of her life.

Mitch decided to follow as Eleven walked into the woods to wallow in her sadness as she engaged in one of humanity's time-tested antidotes to heartbreak, stress-eating. Mitch became impressed as her mother downed one box of waffles after another. This was a rather advanced level of stress eating; and Mitch was experiencing a lot of sympathy pain as her would-be mother wolfed down her 12th waffle.

This was not a good sign. Unlike normal people, who downed alcohol, Eleven's emotional state was measured by the number of Eggos she was stress-eating. People in the future called this the Hopper scale which was named after Mitch's Grandpa Jim, who dealt with Eleven's mood by trying to appease her with food: a four-Eggo problem was for minor tantrums like missing an episode of a show

she really liked; a six-Eggo problem meant she was really stressed; a seven-Eggo problem was when something triggered memories of the lab. a nine-Eggo problem was when she was stressing out about pleasing her Grandma Karen; an eleven-Eggo problem occurred once a year on the anniversary of Mike's death. Mitch had never before seen a twelve-Eggo problem so she assumed this was really bad.

MEANWHILE

Mike was really stressing out the events of the previous afternoon. He shouldn't have yelled at Eleven. He was really inclined to be patient with El; but harming Lucas was out of line. No matter how much Lucas irritated Mike, Lucas was Mike's friend; hurting Lucas was, by extension, hurting Mike as well.

Maybe I need to explain this idea better to El. Mike thought, as he ruminated over several apology scenarios. Apologies needed to wait, however, as Dustin quickly pointed out the fast approaching Troy Harrington with his thug, James. Though not usually one to shy away from danger, the look on Troy's face was nothing short of malicious , even murderous. Mike decided that discretion was the better part of valor and turned tail with Dustin; and ran with Troy and James in hot pursuit. |Unfortunately, there was not much space for them to run as Troy and James caught them dangerously close to the cliffs overlooking the Hawkins quarry. Soon, Mike was in a no-win situation as Troy took out a knife; and threatened to hurt Dustin with it unless Mike jumped off the cliff. Mike was familiar with the Hobson's choice. A moral dilemma where there was no good option. Troy had presented him with one: jump off a cliff, risking serious bodily harm if not death; or live with the knowledge that he simply let Troy harm one of his friends.

Mike's friends were an extension of Mike. The idea of saving himself over them was unthinkable. Dustin was a friend; and a friend was someone you'd do anything for. That was that. There is no quibble in that definition that let him cop out because he feared death or serious bodily harm.

There could be no other way. Mike ignored Dustin's pleas, closed his eyes, then took one fateful step forward, tumbling down and bracing himself for an impact that never came.

IN THE FOREST.

Eleven had a psychokinetic superpower; but that was not nearly as important as the Mike senses that were tingling like a bad case of herpes right now. Mike was in trouble. Mike was a friend, someone you'd do anything for. If he needed help, then she has to be there to provide it. Eleven stood up and began to run toward the source her Mike senses pointed her to. Just like that, a presence, one that had been following her all day, began to move too. El did not pay any attention to that. Mike was in danger; getting him out of danger was the top priority. She ran like her life depended on it; arriving at the quarry to the sight of Mike's two enemies egging him on to jump. She screamed internally as Mike, the first and only friend she had in this world, proceeded to do just that. She panicked out of fear he was about to die; and because she found the act of self-sacrificial heroism oddly attractive. Baffling; but attractive. Luckily, she had just eaten 12 eggos which gave her enough energy to muster a last-ditch emergency response. She called on every ounce of power she had to prevent Mike's squishy body from making contact with the water then carry him back to a safe distance from the cliff's edge.

She then used the last of her remaining strength to take the knife from Troy's hand and break his arm, allowing Dustin to break free. She then collapsed from the exhaustion; even twelve Eggos need some time to make their way through your system. Luckily, the display of raw power had cowed Troy and his goon sufficiently for them to cut and run. Another crisis satisfactorily dealt with

Mike. her sweet Mike, wasted no time running to her side. Exhausted and panicked, she made her admission. "I'm sorry. I opened the Gate; I'm the Monster."

To her relief, the kind Mike she had been crushing on returned, and enveloped her in a tight embrace.

"You're not the monster, El. You saved me!" he said through a curtain of tears streaming down his cheeks.

It was here that El decided that she could dedicate her existence to

protecting this idiot with no instinct for self-preservation alive; that was precisely what she intended to do.

Dustin's insides were crushed as he saw Mike's figure quickly disappear beneath the cliff edge. The first emotion he felt was anger. Oddly enough, it wasn't at Troy; Dustin was mad at Mike. Mike, whom he had warned against splitting the Party up; Mike who had been too stubborn to make amends with Lucas; Mike whom he had repeatedly begged not to jump but did anyway. Everyone in the Party had long known Mike's Hero Complex would likely get him killed. Mike would never hesitate to be a hero for any of his friends. No sacrifice would be too great to ensure the safety of one. This was problematic as Mike Wheeler had a pretty expansive definition of the word friend. There were a lot of people Mike would "do anything for."

That was just half the story, though. In Dustin's opinion, Mike's hero complex had always come from some deep-seethed selfishness. Mike liked to tell everyone that he couldn't lose them; but Mike was also inconsiderate of how others would feel if they lost him. He decided to shelter girl from the storm; then kept defending her even after she prevented them from finding Will. Now, he jumped off a cliff to protect Dustin's teeth even after Dustin told him he could do without. Dustin was also mad at Lucas. Lucas was the one who was supposed to stop Mike when he got into one of these hero complex moods. Mike and Lucas had failed each other by letting petty pride get in the way of their friendship. As Dustin was thinking all these thoughts, he realized he was getting an awful lot of thinking done in the 15-seconds it was supposed to take for Mike Wheeler to become a corpse floating in the Hawkins Quarry. Troy appeared to have noticed this too, as no telltale splash was heard; nor was there a body in the water telling them Mike Wheeler was indeed dead.

Moments later, a decidedly not deceased Mike floated above the cliff edge, much to Dustin's delight, and levitated to a position a few meters away from the edge. Troy's knife flying off his hand gave Dustin the opening he needed to shove his way out of his tormentor's grasp. Dustin, still surprised, noticed their unexpected savior, Eleven.

Boy, was this boy lucky he was somehow attractive to super-powered girls, Dustin thought, as he joined the awkward group hug.

Moments later, his thought fully processed the significance of the situation. *Great, just great! Mike survived; now, I'm going to need to do something equally stupid just to get even.*

Mitch, who was following Eleven, stared in horror as her would-be father, who still hadn't even gotten around to conceiving any children with her would-be mother, threw himself beneath the cliff's edge. For the briefest of moments, all the crucial strings of fate leading to her hung in the balance. She watched with bated breath as the crucial string strained against a cliff's edge. The stories from 2033 all told her to expect this moment; but here in 1983, it all felt very real to her: her would-be father was a suicidally heroic idiot who had no instinct for self-preservation. It all made sense to her now.

To everyone's surprise but Mitch's he floated back above the cliff edge unharmed and alive. The mercurial Mike Wheeler might not be there yet; but Eleven, a very specific type of girl was already smitten with him. Chalk up another one for the inexplicably lucky Mike Wheeler; and the very persistent hand of Destiny.

MOMENTS LATER

A very satisfied-looking Mitch finally saw it: her would-be parents unable to take their eyes off each other, the kind of love Mike's untimely death in 2020 would rob her of seeing as a child. The group of four, Mike and Eleven in particular, walked back to Maple Street oblivious to the rest of the world, even the white vans curiously watching their movements. Mitch was still hesitant to reveal herself, for fear of spoiling history; but they would need her active participation soon enough. Shit was about to get real.

A/N: So what do you think?

If you're like me and find head-hopping annoying, I'm sorry for including so many POVs. In this scene, I felt it was necessary to look at all of these characters and how they felt to fully appreciate the significance of this scene.

11. Chapter 10 - The Calm

A/N: Please do my author heart a favor and review. If you like this story, I want to know; if you don't, that's a shame but I wouldn't mind hearing your thoughts. A writer thrives on the reaction their work elicits from the reader. I'm feeling really lonely. I just need someone to engage with, or something to let me know you're reading and have something to say. :) PLEASE!.

Mitch didn't bother to knock at the basement door of the Wheeler residence. She simply unlocked the door with her powers, walked in, and dramatically told everyone her peace. "You guys are seriously going to need to be ready to leave dodge pretty soon."

"Who are you exactly?" her would be Uncle Dustin asked.

"My names's Tanner...Michelle Tanner. Mitch lied.

A suspicious Mike eyed her from head to toe. "Why should we trust you? WHY SHOULD WE TRUST YOU?" he demanded. Mitch, of course, could not reveal any details of what's about to happen next so she settled for vagueness, in the most Mike Wheeler way possible.

"The bad men. THE BAD MEN." she shouted. Mike Wheeler, the only person who could possibly understand what to do from such a statement immediately started telling everyone to get ready as he checked the windows for goings on outside. Dustin began cramming "essentials" into his bag. Mitch used the boys' distraction to approach Eleven. Thankfully, nobody had thought to ask why there was a girl version of Mike Wheeler in this basement.

"Hello El. My name is Mitch; I'm a friend." Mitch introduced herself.

Eleven nodded in acknowledgment.

Mitch opened her palm to show a quarter; Mitch used her powers to levitate the quarter. Eleven's eyes widened.

"We are the same, you and me, El." Mitch assured her. Mitch put her pointer finger over her lips, and winked.

Eleven smiled in understanding. She threw Mitch an inquisitive look, lifted her arm then pointed to her tattoo.

"I don't have one." Mitch shook her head.

El looked confused.

"I'm not from the lab." Mitch explained. Explaining things was not her best skill set.

Mitch lowered her voice to the softest, most Mike Wheeler tone possible. She began by throwing her mom a toothy smile.

"Listen, Everyone is going to be in danger later. I might need your help to protect everyone." Mitch said.

Eleven nodded in understanding again. Mitch was not used to her mother like this. Eleven could not be shut up back in 2033. Whatever his faults, Mike Wheeler must've been one hell of a drug.

Mitch took a moment to savor this reprieve. There hadn't been many serene moments like this ever since she arrived in 1983; and this was the first time she actually got to interact with her parents as children. There wasn't much time to do it, however' not with the storm she knew would arrive soon.

NOT TOO FAR AWAY

CJ was fast on her way to the Wheeler residence. She hadn't seen Mitch in days; but she had a pretty good idea of where she might be given the date and the amount of shit that was about hit the fan

LANGUAGE! MindMom interjected.

Sorry, Mom. CJ thought mentally apologized. *the amount of fecal matter that was about to hit the fan.* She corrected

What are you telling her off for, you swear all the time! MindDad added. CJ sighed. Once both MindParents started argiong, they were impossible to stop.

THAT'S BULLSHIT, JON! MinMom responded, as if to prove

MindDad's point. This was going to take some time. CJahyssed both mental voice as she carefully approached the Wheeler residence, noting the vans still haven't sprung their trap.

Tonight's the night Mitch is going to need me most. she thought. She knocked on the back basement door. Her would-be uncle Dustin answered the door. "Sorry! Kind of busy right now." he declared before trying to close the door. CJ stopped him. "Wait! Wait! I'm just here to check if my cousin Michelle is inside. She may have introduced herself as Mitch." CJ half-panicked. "You know Michelle?" Sure! C'mon in! Dustin waved her in without so much as a second glance.

Inside, she was Mitch in a quiet, intimate, conversation with Eleven; or at least as close to a conversation as one can hold with a girl of so few words.

Mitch glanced for a moment in her direction. CJ met the glance with a raised eyebrow. Mitch stood up, and slowly approached CJ. "Where on earth have you been?" Mitch asked in an uncharacteristic soft voice. "Well, you were busy stressing over your parents; so I went ahead to do my own thing." CJ replied.

"And it took you three days?" Mitch asked suspiciously.

"That's less time than you spent stalking your own parents." CJ responded indignantly.

"Which is THE freaking mission. a-k-a the reason we came here in the first place." Mitch added.

"The mission was to observe from afar; and let destiny do its work Not to actually be in the room where it happened, Mitch.

"CJ... I love you... but if you reference a Hamilton song title one more time, I'll..." Mitch glowered.

"You'll what?" CJ said. "Turn my world upside-down?" CJ raised an eyebrow.

"You know. That's actually not a bad idea." Mitch said darkly, as the lights began to flicker.

CJ assumed a fighting pose. When you're friends with a powerful psychokinetic girl, it's important to be as deferential as possible without being a push-over, especially if the said girl was a hot-headed Wheeler.

Ever since Mike and Will met in Kindergarten, kick starting a decades-long history of Wheeler-Byers friendship, the usual dynamic had been that a Wheeler would blow their short fuse; while a Byers would try to calm them down. This changed with CJ's parents. There was no way the Byers half of the family would accept being servile recipients of infamously short Wheeler tempers; that is why Joyce, Jonathan, Will, and even Grandpa Jim agreed on what became the "Mike Rule": *Never start a fight with a Wheeler; but if they start one with you, try to deescalate without conceding defeat.* This was better known as the "Let Mike punch you but don't move out of his way" rule. In the future, Mike Wheeler's brilliance led to an increasing number of people having to deal with the Wheeler family. This led to a demand in Byers family members who had mastered the art of dealing with these hotheads. The Byers were so good at this that CJ's family would become known as the "Quadruple-U" or Wheeler Whisperers." CJ now put these skills to work.

"Do you really want to start a massive telekinetic tantrum inside your family's ancestral home? With both your would-be parents watching?" CJ whispered. Respect for elders was not a Wheeler quality, as evidenced by all the times Mike Wheeler simply ignored anything they said. Mitch, however was not a normal Wheeler; she was raised by a single mother who didn't have a normal childhood of her own, had a ton of deep-seethed daddy issues, and would be rightfully worried about the structural integrity of the Wheeler basement should she throw a telekinetic fit. Mitch considered CJ's question and lunged at CJ... enveloping her in a tight hug that was reciprocated in kind. Mitch was a huge mess of emotional issues, neuroses, and psychological problems; but she was a kind one.

Dustin had been watching the entire time. He had no idea who these girls were; but the idea of a cat fight (not to be confused with the literal cat fights Mews seemed to enjoy way too much) was exciting to him. He took a pack of Nilla wafers, took a comfortable seat; and was promptly disappointed when no fight happened.

This was a short reprieve, however; the calm was about to make way for the storm.

A/N: So does anyone have thoughts? Am I doing this story justice? Am I any good? or am I trash?

Did anyone spot the cultural reference I made here?

12. Chapter 11- Slowly into the Storm

Shit hit the fan the way you fall asleep: slowly,; then all at once (my apologies to John Green).

It all began the same way the stories say it: with a garbled supercomm call from an out-of-breath Lucas.

Mike picked it up and everyone listened in. Then began the guessing.

"The Padlock?" Mike wondered aloud.

"The Kraken?" Dustin suggested.

"The Batman?" Mike offered again before it hit him and Dustin like a truck you should've seen a minute beforehand.

"THE BAD MEN!" Both exclaimed.

Mitch rolled her eyes; then threw CJ her *"I just told then that less than an hour ago."* look. CJ understood and nodded.

Boys. She thought , as she rolled her eyes as well.

The resulting mess started getting bigger as Mike checked the windows and found white vans everywhere. After telling his mom to tell everyone he'd left the country, Mike led Dustin and Eleven out of the back door. Mitch and CJ, lacking bikes of their own, told the others that they'd find them. The Party barely got away in time. Mitch and CJ slipped away unnoticed by the Lab agents, hoping that Mike and the others still end up safe in the junkyard by that afternoon.

Lucas Sinclair was pedaling as hard as he can to get to the Wheelers. He had to warn Mike before a small army of armed men came knocking at his door. He was right. Following the compass did not lead him to Will; but he did find a hornet's nest of bad men. Maybe Eleven was right too; it was dangerous, or at least appeared to be. Now was not the time for I-told-you-so; even if Mike would be otherwise unaware of the danger that was coming for him. Now was the time to warn a friend, and to mend a friendship.

Was Lucas still mad at Mike? Definitely. When asked to choose between him and a total stranger, Mike chose the stranger. Friends would do anything for each other; but Mike would rather lose him than give Eleven up. Lucas wasn't mad because Mike was a stubborn pig-headed idiot.... alright, maybe he was, slightly; Lucas was made because he was jealous. Mike had the opportunity to show his priorities; and Lucas was apparently not as high up the list as he would have preferred or thought. That kind of realization stings. Mike had only expanded his circle of friends once since meeting Lucas: when they made room for Dustin; but Dustin didn't turn Mike into some kind of love-struck idiot, blind to anything else.

This wasn't Lucas' first rodeo in a fight with Mike. Mike was stubborn so Lucas knew he had to accommodate his pride; but Mike could also be insensitive, meaning he had to draw lines in the sand so Mike wouldn't cross them in the future. What could possibly be worth all this hassle? Only the kind of friend who might be literally willing to die for you, which Mike was, no matter how dumb the reason.

That is why Lucas desperately contacted his friend via Supercomm to warn him about the coming bad men. It took a few tries; but they finally got the idea and agreed to meet him at a street corner near Mike's. A friend is someone you'd do anything for; and Lucas was willing to face the US government for Mike.

Things were also starting to get real on Mike's end as he mounted his bike, with Eleven hitching behind him of course. They managed to leave his house just mere moments before a fleet of white vans surrounded it, trapping everyone inside.

Mike rode like the wind, faster than a boy without a bike helmet should have been. He kept pedaling even as White vans blocked one road after another. Mike refused to stop; not even when a White van started accelerating in front of them, TOWARD THEM. It was a high-stakes game of chicken between a boy desperate to save a girl from a government conspiracy and some nameless goon driving a van. Mike hoped beyond hope that the goon would blink first.

As it turned out, neither Mike nor the van blinked first. Eleven, afraid the game might not end satisfactorily, simply flipped the van. in the air, over all their heads allowing them to slip away to the junkyard

unmolested.

Mitch and CJ, lacking their own bikes, opted to go on foot. They went from one hiding spot to another, taking care to make sure they weren't being followed. In two hours time, they found themselves at the junkyard; just in time to see Hopper picking up the kids from their abandoned bus. Instead of hitching, they opted to walk to the Byers House.

BYERS HOUSE

Mitch was annoyed. Everyone had been discussing what to do next. Mitch, who knew exactly what to do next but couldn't spoil it for anybody, was forced to watch silently as everyone made dumb suggestion that she couldn't call out without revealing her secret. Cassandra was cursed with being able to see tragedies in the future; but having no one believe her. Mitch was cursed with being sidelined even if she knew the future she couldn't reveal the future for fear of changing it.

CJ was not faring any better. She knew exactly how to improvise a sensory deprivation chamber; but had to stay quiet as Dustin called Mr. Clarke for a question she could've answered better in half the time. The no active intervention rule could sometimes suck big-time.

CJ, bored out of her mind, approached Mitch.

"Are you as tired of this bullshit as I am?" CJ asked

Mitch nodded in agreement.

"I think I know who caused the Timequake." CJ revealed.

"Really? Who?" Mitch asked.

"We could be in real trouble if I'm right." CJ said

"Why?" Mitch asked.

"Because if the Mind Flayer knows what they know, things might get really bad tonight." CJ said.

"What do you propose to do about it?" CJ asked.

"Well.... " CJ began.

HAAWKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM.

Eleven wasn't particularly fond of the bath. However, it was kind of hard to refuse the combined persuasive power of Mike Wheeler and Joyce Byers as they asked her for this favor. The pretty Nancy Wheeler also sounded pretty sincere when she added her own request.

As she made ready, it just so happened that she was being assisted by Mike. She became conscious as she felt her now wig-less head as Mike assisted her. They were alone.

Mike noticed her consternation and promptly reassured her. "You don't need it."

"Still pretty?" she asked.

"Yeah. Real pretty." came Mike's unqualified reply. The moment was intimate as they began to close the gap between their lips, almost making it all the way when they were interrupted by CJ walking in on them.

At this rate, Mitch is going to kill me. CJ mused. It was dangerous to stand in the way of destiny; especially with her fiery cousin determined to see it through.

Joyce Byers was exhausted. It had been a long and stressful week, the kind that only a missing son and a government conspiracy involving the supernatural can cause. All her hopes now lay on this little girl floating on an inflatable pool inside a school gym. She waited with bated breath until she gave her a location: Castle Byers which Joyce followed up by sending a few assurances to Will. Joyce was coming to save her son, and nothing, not monsters nor armed government agents, was going to stop her.

OUTSIDE THE BYERS HOUSE

"Why are we going again?" Mitch asked.

"To confront our timerbreaker." CJ said. "You do not want to stay back in that Middle School gym doing nothing and walking in on romance." CJ said.

"But what if I DO want to watch romance?" Mitch asked.

"Love is a lot like quantum theory: it's too complex to understand, and is used to explain way too many things. The act of observing a phenomenon also changes the phenomenon itself." CJ explained "You don't want to be vamping Daddy's style back there by being too much of a stalker." CJ concluded.

Mitch and CJ now stood outside Castle Byers.

"This.... is Castle Byers?" Mitch asked, looking unimpressed at a sloppily put together pile of wood and curtains.

"Don't knock on Castle Byers, Michelle It's one of my family's treasures. CJ said. CJ stepped forward with a flourish, and pulled back the curtain. Mitch went in, and was surprised by the next face she saw. The storm just blew a few Categories stronger.

A/N: Again, I have to apologize for too much head-hopping. I hope it didn't bother anyone too much. I'm all about exploring neglected viewpoints. I'd love to hear your thoughts. Do you think my chapters are too short? I need to know for the next time I write a story. Anyways, I'm adding another chapter to the story (giving us 14 from the originally intended 13). I hope people are still reading or these Author Notes become just an idiot talking to thin air.

13. Chapter 12- Dilemmas

A/N: In this chapter, I might touch on tackling a few moral dilemmas. As is standard in ethics classes, I will present the positions without really endorsing any side, although my preferred position may become apparent in my writing. This will be a long one, so I hope reading this doesn't bore anyone.

"Uncle Will?" This was all a shocked Michelle could manage to say.

"Michelle? What are you doing here?" the older Will Byers asked.

"Saving the World." Mitch said. "What are YOU doing here?"

Be careful how you answer. Mitch's MindMom warned her.

"I'm here to help." the adult Will replied

"Why you?" Mitch asked. "You have a volatile connection to the Mind Flayer, the very danger we're saving the world from."

"When an apocalyptic event pretty much kills everybody, beggars can't be choosers " Will said.

"That's true." Mitch replied. "But it doesn't change the risk that anything you hear or see might make its way back to our enemy."

Wait a minute. If you're here, who's protecting us? Mitch's MindMom wondered.

I'm sure you can care for yourselves. Mitch mentally replied.

Famous last words. Mitch's MindMom concluded.

At this point, Mitch threw tact and caution to the wind and directly asked her uncle the question she had been dying to ask.

"Were you the one who broke time?" Mitch asked.

Stunned at the question, the adult Will broke into tears. "I'm sorry. It made me." He said.

"Who made you?" Mitch asked. The adult Will stammered

"WHO made you?" Mitch repeated.

"The Mind Flayer. Adult Will admitted

"Are you still under its influence?" Mitch asked. Adult Will nodded.

"But how? Time travel under the Mind Flayer's influence is theoretically impossible. Mitch asked.

"Theoretically, yes." Will admitted. "But there is a loophole."

"What do you mean? How could you do this?" Mitch asked

When no answer came, she repeated. "HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?"

"Studies on the Upside Down have been going on for some time around the world. One lab studying it in Antarctica went down in 2020. It was a small and largely contained breach; but it was still a gate. It was a slow process; but I eventually fell into the Mind Flayer's influence again last year." Adult Will explained

"And you couldn't resist?" Mitch asked.

"I never could. I can shake it off for a bit to send a message; but really throwing it off requires effort on Mike or Mom would be willing to make. " Will lamented.

"YOU BROKE TIME!" Mitch replied. "You messed with rules that Mike... my dad... put in place!"

"It's pretty rich for one of Mike's kids to lecture me about SHOULDN'Ts." the adult Will practically laughed.

"Wait. What?" Mitch asked.

The adult Will began to explain.

If you're both here, who's protecting everyone else? CJ's MindMom thought-whispered, the moment Mitch went in.

You and dad are just a short run away. I can respond quickly if

necessary. CJ reassured the doubts in her head. *Besides, you can both kick ass.*

Well, maybe I can but he can't. CJ's MindMom replied.

HEY! interjected an indignant MindDad.

CJ listened carefully as her Uncle Will confirmed what she had suspected to her cousin. She was particularly in agreement when he raised the topic of *SHOULDN'Ts*. Mitch, a Wheeler, was particularly wont to see the world in terms of hard, inflexible rules. There are two kinds of rules: *CAN'Ts*, and *SHOULDN'Ts*. *CAN'Ts* are rules set by immutable objective realities in the Universe. Not even a stubborn Wheeler can defy the Laws of Gravity; at least not for long. *SHOULDN'Ts* are less ironclad rules with no physical realities enforcing them; Wheelers tended to play fast and loose with these. Friends don't lie, yes; but a Wheeler can lie if they need a certain cousin to come with them to the past.

However, the conversation began to take a tedious turn.

"So what if we don't always follow the rules? What does that have to do with helping the Mind Flayer destroy the future?" Mitch said.

"Michelle. You are just like Mike: believing that right and wrong can be so simple." the adult Will countered.

"There is a ton of misery back in 2023. Are you saying you won't even consider breaking the rules to fix them?" Adult Will challenged.

"Of course I would!" Mitch replied; but the effects of messing with the past are uncertain. If you pull on one string you pull on two more which tug on others until time itself unravels..." Mitch rambled.

The adult Will smiled. "So like Mike; yet so unlike Mike as well. You think your father really considered consequences? The boy who would jump off a cliff for his friends without a second thought. You may share Mike's black-and-white morality; but you do not have his impetuosity. For all the talk now about that Crucial String, Mike Wheeler never seemed to understand that he was the Crucial String for too many people. His death in 2010 deprived the world of more

than just your father. The Party lost the leader holding it together, I lost the only friend who might have noticed the creeping influence of the Mind Flayer on me, the US Government lost the one operative who could've kept the Time Program under tight control." Adult Will lamented.

"Tell me, Michelle, would you not jump at the opportunity to prevent Mike's death in 2010 if you could have? Or would Mike just be another victim of this policy of doing nothing in the face of unjustifiable wrong in the world?" Adult Will was now throwing one dilemma after another.

"And should the Mike of 1983 make different decisions that deviate from the Timeline you know, would you let him? Or would you seek to override his free will?" Adult Will challenged her once more.

"I would need to look at the merits of the situation." Mitch answered.

"And so you admit the 'Do Nothing Rule' is a bit more flexible than you made it out to be, did you not?" Adult Will grinned. "Why would saving your father's life be more important than a opportunity for me the years of trauma I've endured?

Mitch stammered. At this point, CJ entered the room.

"Mitch, I think we should go. That's not Uncle Will talking anymore." CJ said.

"No, stay, Carrie-Joy. I'm enjoying this too much to stop now." Adult Will demanded.

"Alright, then please allow me one question." CJ requested

"Ask what you must." Adult Will granted

"What exactly have you done here in 1983 that Mitch and I should know about? CJ asked.

"I haven't done anything. The Mind Flayer merely sent me back to deliver information to itself in the past. While it is theoretically impossible for one of its minions to travel to the past without dying, one such minion could also survive if it went back to a time when a

Gate is open. The Mind Flayer from the future can simply hand over the minion to itself in the past. The minion can then serve as a vessel to bring knowledge of the future to itself in the past." Adult Will explained.

"You see, I meant no harm; I didn't think I was going to survive the trip. The Mind Flayer made me. Believe or not; it's your choice; but at least let me redeem myself by trying to help." Adult Will implored.

CJ turned to Mitch. "Maybe you should let it go for now." CJ said.

Listen to your cousin. Mitch's MindMom said.

"Anyways, since both of you are here, the Mind Flayer seems to have decided that no one's protecting any of your parents." Adult Will declared.

For a moment, both Mitch and CJ were dumbstruck.

I told you so. Mitch's MindMom told her.

CJ spoke first. "We have to worry about protecting my parents first. The school is too far away for us to get there in time. Let's go to the Byers House and help my Mom and Dad." CJ said.

"No way! Mike and Eleven are our first priority!" argued Mitch.

"Listen Mitch; we have differing priorities; but we cannot protect our parents individually as well as we would as a pair. Come help me with my parents; and I'll help you with yours." CJ offered.

Mitch, still conflicted, reluctantly agreed. "Aww, Alright. But we'll have to make our stop at the Byers real quick. "

"Excellent!" CJ said; before she brought out a syringe and injected its contents into the Adult Will. Adult Will quickly plopped unconscious as Mitch expressed shock at what had just occurred, seemingly demanding an explanation.

"Byers family protocol: Always carry a syringe of sedative in case Uncle Will goes rogue again. " CJ revealed, throwing Mitch a wink.

"Our parents are in danger!" Mitch exclaimed.

"You go run ahead to the Middle School. I'll prepare stuff here before I rush to the Byers house, CJ instructed."

"What!? I thought the plan was to stick together and protect Aunt Nancy and Uncle Jonathan first?" Mitch asked, confused.

"That was just a ruse for Will so the Mind Flayer won't expect you at the Middle School." CJ explained. "So unless you're not fond of existing, I suggest you haul ass over to the school, right the fuck now!" CJ commanded.

Mitch was glad CJ had quickly come up with a plan to deal with what could have been a very thorny dilemma.

"CJ, I love you!" Mitch shouted, before running out of Castle Byers.

"I know I'm awesome, Mitch; and that better be what you meant!" CJ shouted back.

Both girls now raced against the clock as though their very existence depended in it. CJ had hidden caches to retrieve ; and Mitch had to get to school on time.

Can't you run A LOT faster? complained Mitch's MindMom as Mitch sprinted as fast as she could.

I'm doing my best. Mitch mentally answered-through gritted-teeth.

Doing a little better can't hurt, especially since your very existence depends on it. Mitch's MindMom quipped.

As CJ retrieved a hidden backback in the hollow of a tree, she hoped she could make it in time. She had lulled the MindFlayer into thinking no help was coming to the Middle School; but her deception meant it would be expecting twice as much resistance in the Byers Residence.

YEAH, What was up with that? CJ MindMom probed.

I had to think on the fly. No offense, Mom. CJ mentally responded.

OK, so what about the horde of monsters surely coming our way? MindMom asked.

Relax, I have a plan. CJ responded.

And that plan would be...? MindMom speculated aloud.

I'll let my badass mother handle it. CJ thought, nonchalantly.

CJ could swear she heard her mother's face meet the palm of her hand... mentally, of course.

CJ wasted no time rushing to the Byers House.

The pieces were set; The clock was ticking; shit had been hitting the fan slowly for most of the evening. Now, it was time for it to go in all-at-once.

This better not kill me. CJ's MindMom said.

Relax. You're still more likely to die worrying yourself sick over something your idiot brother did. CJ mentally answered.

A/N: I personally feel that I could have done a little more showing as opposed to telling. I'm operating on a tight schedule before school starts again so I didn't really have much time to write showy paragraphs. Besides, my preference for writing intense emotions favors a telling approach.

Let me know if you have other thoughts.

14. Chapter 13 - All at Once

BYERS RESIDENCE

There were two things Nancy and Jonathan did not expect tonight: first, they didn't expect the monster to be here so early before most of their traps were set; second, they didn't expect there to be two. While Jonathan was busy running away from one, Nancy was fighting the other for dear life. "Fighting" might have been a generous term. "Fending it off with laughable equipment" would've been more accurate.

Nancy desperately tried to stop the monster relentlessly going after her. She fired one shot after the other to seemingly no effect. Inevitably, she ended up with an empty gun and a still very much alive monster. Nancy closed her eyes, bracing for what she thought to be inevitable; only it never arrived.

The monster screamed in pain as CJ threw a Molotov cocktail into its wide-open mouth. The fire began to hurt it inside as CJ followed up with an augmented pistol which finally brought down the tough monster.

CJ paused for a moment to let the sound of a screaming Steve be heard as he dealt with the other Demogorgon. Nancy let her jaw drop.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Nancy asked the girl she only recognized as one of the hangers-on Mike brought in that afternoon.

"My mother taught me!" CJ quipped. *So remember to teach her.* CJ mentally added.

MINUTES EARLIER

CJ did not anticipate the Mind Flayer's minions being so early.

Rats! she thought. She would need to act fast. She peeked in to see two Demogorgons chasing her parents. *That's one more than I thought; I'm going to need help.* CJ considered.

CJ shook her head. In a world before 9/11, her parents could've bought any combination of weapons or explosives they wanted without ending up on a dozen federal watch lists; instead they settled for cheap traps and low-caliber guns. *Oh well, time to save these idiots.* she thought.

Luckily, CJ witnessed the arrival of one she could recruit to help her.

Steve Harrington drove all the way to the Byers house with plans to apologize to Jonathan and Nancy. What happened earlier was not him. He just wasn't himself when he was with Tommy and Carol.

The first thing he heard upon stopping his car was of gunshots from inside the house.

What the hell? Steve wondered. *Was that Nancy? Is she alright?*

The next thing he knew, a young girl approached him ; and handed him what appeared to be a weapon.

"Nancy's in trouble. Use this to help. When the monster opens it mouth, aim the nozzle at its mouth, then pull this trigger." The girl instructed before running away.

"HEY! Monster? What the hell is going on?" Steve shouted.

"No time for questions; just come after me." The girl shouted back.

SHIT! SHIT! SHIT! SHIT! Steve thought as he came running after the girl.

This girl was... strange, to say the least. She knocked down the Byers' door instead of knocking and led Steve into the House. Steve nearly doiled his pants upon seeing the monster inside.

"Holy shit! WHAT THE HELL IS THAT? !" he shouted before he noticed the second one pinning Nancy down.

The girl tossed him a bat spiked with nails then pointed to the first one.

"You handle that one, I'll deal with the one after Nancy" the girl

instructed. "Do you understand?"

Steve nodded; and got to work.

A lot of people did not know that Steve Harrington, popular jock and 'King' of Hawkins High, was actually pretty fond of children. As strange as it was for a girl to hand him a bunch of weapons and order him around, there was no way he was going to say no to a child asking for help. In hindsight, as he faced off with a large monster in this tacky house, it was probably not the best decision in his life to get involved here.

Wait, are those Christmas lights? Steve observed as he rushed to fight the monster in the hallway, the one that was going after a Jonathan Byers seeking refuge behind a door.

He probably didn't sound very heroic doing it, and there was probably way too much screaming involved; but he got its attention with the bat before shoving the gun-like weapon in its face when it turned to 'roar' at him. He pulled the trigger.

Steve yelped back as the 'gun' unleashed a trail of fire, setting the creature ablaze.

Steve resisted the urge to turn his back on it and walk away slowly, like in an action movie. It was satisfying to watch the monster scream in agony. While an astonished Jonathan Byers peeked from behind the door staring at him.

He screamed in surprise when Nancy Wheeler tapped his shoulder from behind.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Nancy asked.

"I came here to say sorry for how I acted earlier." Steve replied. "I ditched Carol and Tommy; and I came looking for you and Jonathan."

Steve turned to the aforementioned boy, who was just traipsing his way past the charred remains of the monster Steve just killed.

"Sorry for earlier, man." Steve began. "And are those Christmas lights? Because it's WAAAY too early to start decorating."

"Water under the bridge, YES, and my mom went a little crazy over my missing brother." Jonathan replied.

CJ silently agreed that her Grandma Joyce may have gone A LITTLE overboard this one time in 1983.

Arts and crafts is a weird way to process your grief. CJ thought.

No, it's not! CJ's MindDad reprimanded her.

Look at this house! It's a fucking mess! CJ observed.

One, don't talk about your grandmother like that; two, Did you just McGyver a flamethrower and an augmented pistol from junkyard materials? Mind Dad countered.

CJ broke her mental reverie to talk to Steve. 1983 Steve was way more awesome than she initially thought.

"Thanks for doing me a solid, Steve." CJ said.

"No problem!" the jock replied.

"Gotta jet, though." CJ said.

"Nancy, Jonathan. Would you mind giving a little girl a ride back to the Middle School? I'm meeting my friend there." CJ requested.

Nancy and Jonathan issues to work through; but Steve offered to do it. He was fond of kids, after all."

"Thank you, Steve!" CJ said.

"How do you know my name again?" Steve asked.

"ECERYONE knows King Steve down at the Middle School." CJ said.

MEANWHILE

Mitch, out of breath, was still running like her life depended on it which it sort of did.

She shuddered a little as a bunch of White vans rushed past her on

the way to the Middle School but. nonetheless, kept going. She wondered if she'd still have energy left to use her powers.

12-Eggo Stress eating is unhealthy; but it probably helps when you're ending the night by killing a Demogorgon. Mitch thought.

She ran a little more over a slight rise until, finally, she saw Hawkins Middle School in front of her, quiet as a light and unaware of the shitstorm that was about to hit it.

LANGUAGE! Mitch's MindMom admonished her.

Shut up, Mindmom. Mitch mentally replied.

Respect your mother, Mitch. RESPECT your mother! a newer, but no less bossy MindDad told her. Mitch may not have grown up with a father; but a week stalking observing Mike Wheeler had given her a [pretty good idea of what her dad would've been like.

Mitch rolled her eyes, like only a true daughter of Mike Wheeler can, as she walked into Hawkins Middle School.

15. Chapter 14 - Goodbye

A/N: I had to put a lot of thought into this one. In the end, this'll be my penultimate upload for this fic. Anyone care to give me their final thoughts? I'll upload an epilogue; but I'll need to know your thoughts on something first... Did you like my fic? Would you read a sequel if I wrote one? The answer to the sequel question will affect the contents of the epilogue.

HAWKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Mike cursed his luck. Not only did his sister slink off with Jonathan to God-only-knows-where; he was faced with the biggest challenge of his young life: impressing a super-powered girl using only conversation. He rambled, he promised, and he smiled; but nothing seemed enough to do the trick. Making this worse was the fact that Eleven, the girl he was trying to impress, didn't contribute much by way of conversation which left with the horrible option of steering the conversation by himself. As was evident in his pitiful, stumbling attempts, this left him with nothing but his nervous self-defeating, neurotic tendencies.

"Mike, I found the chocolate pudding!" He heard Dustin say.

"Okay!" he screameed back; before reverting back to his softer voice with Eleven.

"Are you feeling any better?" Mike asked El, lacking anything better to say.

"What is... putting?" El asked. Mike quietly rejoiced at the conversation starter.

"It's this chocolate goo you eat with a spoon." he explained. "Don't worry. When all this is over, you don't have to keep eating junk food and leftovers like a dog anymore." he assured her.

"My mom's a pretty awesome cook; she can make whatever you like." Mike offered, in that classic playa move of trying to impress a girl with your mom's cooking.

"Eggos?" El asked.

Seriously? I offer you anything my mom can cook and you ask for frozen waffles? Mike thought. Boy, he had to teach her some healthier eating habits.

"Yeah. But real food too." he replied. Since this had put him in a promise-making mood, he made additional promises about a bed and parents too in typical Mike Wheeler fashion of not consulting with anyone before committing them to one of his schemes.

"Amd Nancy. She'll be like your new sister." Mike concluded. Thinking nothing better of it.

"Will you be like my brother?" El asked, making the next logical step from the previous promise.

For some reason, Mike felt a bit disgusted at this thought, more than he had thought he would.

WHAT!NO! Ewww. Gross. He thought; his previous statement to Nancy came back to him.

"What! No. No." He finally answered.

"Why?" Eleven asked, clearly not letting the topic go.

Mike did not have answer to this. Okay, maybe he DID like Eleven and he had lied to Nancy earlier. He really wasn't sure; or willing to think about it.

"Because it's different" He managed to say, followed by a string of aimless rambling that Mike always ended up resorting to when he was trying to avoid the truth.

"Mike? Friends don't lie." El countered.

Damn. Don't make me regret teaching you that. Mike thought.

Instead of being completely honest, he decided to deflect by indirectly asking her to the Snowball, explaining that one was not supposed to come to cheesy school dances with one's sister.

"You go to school dances with with someone that you like." he conceded.

"A friend?" she asked.

Seriously? he thought. she was pretty cute when she was clueless.

"Not a friend." he answered. "Someone like a... a..."

Deciding that this situation was not going to get better until he was completely honest, Mike stopped rambling and simply went in for a quick chaste kiss to her lips to say what he couldn't find the words to express. This was *thankfully* not resisted and they ended in a warm moment shared between two people who had suddenly reached an intimate mutual understanding.

Destiny, however, had the worst timing. Mitch burst into the cafeteria moments later.

"Just coming in to tell you guys that they found us." Mitch said to the sound of multiple vehicles arriving in the background. This prompted a wild scramble to get away as quickly as possible. Mike led them out through the school, wondering how on earth the lab had located them.

"Lando." Dustin said as they discussed how they might have been found.

They didn't get very far. A bunch of very armed, very menacing, and very evil-looking lab agents were in their way not-so-subtly pointing their weapons threateningly at them. Dustin gulped. This seemed like the end.

Only it wasn't. Because Eleven took this opportunity to demonstrate her ability to squish brains; and four lab soldiers were quickly dead in front of them.

Unfortunately, this also exhausted Eleven and she collapsed on the floor causing a neurotic, totally-not-in-love Mike to freak out.

The head baddie from the Lab used this opportunity to catch up to them.

"Step away from the child." he ordered. Dustin did not like that tone. Mike didn't either, apparently, because the next words to come out of his mouth sure sounded like it.

"No! You want her? You're going to have to kill us first!" Mike shouted back.

Wait what? Us? Dustin thought. he did not remember agreeing to this. But Mike's bravery was sort of infectious because Dustin soon felt compelled to back him up.

"That's right! Dustin seconded.

"Eat shit!" Lucas concurred.

"Ok, make it four!" The girl Dustin only knew as Michelle Tanner joined in.

Not wanting to actually take them up on the offer, the lab men opted for restraining the four totally-not-consenting pre-teens so Brenner could work his dark intentions on Eleven. They all struggled against the holds seemingly in vain. All seemed lost again... until the lights flickered.

Mitch knew she could beat all these knuckleheads up on her own; but she needed to "let history happen" so she resigned herself to being restrained by these bad men. Besides, she needed to be ready for the Mind Flayer's attack, and wasting her energy on these soldiers as a nonstarter. Still, Mike, who seemingly had no appreciation for how scrawny he was compared to the big men restraining him, struggled anyway. She was beginning to wonder how her dad was going to survive the next 40 years before now and her birth in 2011. All was seemingly going to shit when the lights suddenly started to flicker.

"Blood. BLOOD!" she heard Mike say.

"Jurassic Park. JURASSIC PARK!" Mitch's thoughts countered. The continual repetition of the T-Rex saving the day trope was getting old, in her opinion.

At that moment, the Demogorgon burst out of the wall, lunging for Dr. Martin Brenner, killing him.

Well, that's definitely changing history. Mitch thought with a satisfied smirk

What surprised Mitch was the pack of Demodogs that came with it, mopping up the shocked lab soldier and feasting on Brenner's body for good measure. As the soldiers let go to fight the horde of hellbeasts, Mitch used her powers to fight off the demodogs, telepathically sending most of them back. She turned to the shocked boys beside her.

"What the fuck are you waiting for!? Fly, you fools!" she said

LANGUAGE, Michelle! Mitch's MindMom admonished her. *You spend too much time with your cousin and Aunt Nancy. I swear they've corrupted you.*

Kind of busy right now, Mom. Mitch mentally responded as she threw back another charging demodog.

The three boys took El and started running while Mitch held off the Demodogs sent by the Mind Flayer.

"Nice. Lord of the Rings reference!" Dustin shouted back as he carried El. Mitch rolled her eyes.

Lucas was surprised that there was a second super-powered girl running around; but one tends to not dwell on such things when one is running for one's life. Mike, Lucas, and Dustin ran all the way to the last classroom on the hall: Mr. Clarke's science classroom.

Their backs were on the wall, almost literally; Eleven was barely alive and laid down on a table. The three boys quietly hoped the Democreasures would either be stopped; or forget about them. As they listened to the sound of desperate gunshots trying and failing to slay literal monsters., they crossed their fingers and hoped for the best. If the literal monsters weren't so deadly; then maybe they'd be happy to see them slaughter the figurative monsters outside.

The sounds in the hallway grew louder and louder; then suddenly became quiet.

Is it dead? Lucas wondered.

Apparently not. he remarked when the very-not-dead monster burst through the door, wailing its heart out.

Lucas scrambled for the Wrist rocket. He found it, tookrock, then aimed for the Demogorgon, not a very easy thing to do when you have Dustin and Mike screaming at you along the way. The first shot didn't do the trick; so Lucas firedsecond, then a third. He was pretty sure he was a goner when he fired the fourth shot into the Monster's open mouth. It was going to be futile; but there was no greater honor than to die alongside one's friends fighting for another friend's safety. Hence, he fired the rock as a last defiant act at the monster faxcing , this seemed to work as the monster's maw closed and it staggered back.

Lucas stood open-mouthed in shock. He had not expected that to work where multiple high-powered rifles had failed.

Holy crap! He thought.

Eleven was thankful for the 12 eggos she had eaten earlier. she had broken Troy's arm , flipped a van, and crushed the brains of four people; but she still had strength left to, among other things, save her used the strength to send the Demogorgon flying back against the dark board in front of the room. She moved in front of her astonished friends. Mike, as she expected, tried to stop her, so she sent him back flying onto the wall behind him. She had seen how far he was willing to go for his friends; and that was not a sacrifice she would never allow him to try again, notwhile she could help it.

She was going to do what needed to be done: to slay this monster. She also knew it was going to take more energy than her frail little body could safely handle. In short, she was ready to die for her friends.

"Goodbye, Mike." She uttered tearfully. She had long known she would eventually need to say goodbye; but this wasn't exactly what she had in mind. It broke her heart to see Mike as devastated as she felt inside; but this was necessary: the Monster needed to die so it couldn't hurt any more of her friends.

"No more." She told the Demogorgon as she began to focus her energy

on it. The monster pinned on the wall began to disintegrate from the force of her power. Inside, she felt like she was coming undone as well.

She heard the monster unleash a loud wail as it turned into black dust. This led her to redouble her efforts to finally end this threat to her friends. A friend must do everything for another friend; this was her doing her duty as a friend. Her heart broke thinking she'd never see any of them again. No more indeed. Time to die; it is what Mike would do, after all.

She let out one last burst of strength, finally tearing the once indomitable monster apart. In the process, she felt her own body get torn, apart as it joined the cloud of black dust that

As Mitch dealt with the chaos of demodogs running amok in the halls and soldiers failing to contain them, she let the Demogorgon through to the classroom behind her. There was no point trying to stop time; she barely had the strength to hold back the monster, demodogs kept her busy for a while, though, so she was left with barely anything to do other than throwing individual demodogs back as the demogorgon did its work inside.

By the time there were no more demodogs to fight, the only thing left to see was her mother disintegrating into black dust, leaving her visibly heartbroken father crying out for inside, Mitch cried with him. She knew this wasn't going to last; this was only the beginning. What made Mitch sad was knowing that these two souls destined for each other still had a long road full of pain to go. When destiny puts two hearts on the same path, it subjects them to a crucible of fire. The finest alloys can only be formed over the hottest of flames. Two threads tied together by fate; that was how the strongest string could be made. Only on such a string, a very crucial one, could all the other strings of fate be tied to form a great web for humanity.

A/N: So there you have it. I am more or less done with the Crucial String. The next upload will be an epilogue;; but I first need to know your answers to a few questions:

1. Did you like my writing?

2. If you read the whole thing... what kept you reading?
3. Are my chapters too short? too long? or just right?
4. What can I improve to give my readers a better experience?
5. As a straight, adult, male, do I have blindspots or cringe-worthy moments when I was writing about women or children?
6. On a scale of 1-11 (11 being the highest), how would you rate this fic? Why?
- 7.)Do you want me to make a sequel to this fic? (The answer here will have implications for how I write the epilogue)

A/N:

2.)Did you like this story?

3.)Did you like how I wrote it?

4.)Any final thoughts?

45.) Do you have any suggestions for a future story Please PM for this one).

Thanks for reading. I hope to hear from some of you.

16. Epilogue - The Other Threads

A/N: Since nobody made comments either way. I'm uploading my epilogue as I wrote it. Thank you for everyone kind enough to let me know their thoughts. You make all this feel worthwhile. I guess. I'll decide on a sequel if I ever feel like it.

In less than week, Hawkins, Indiana went from a sleepy small-town existence to being the eye of a supernatural maelstrom that led to two deaths on the record; and at least a dozen off of it. A few monsters were slain: one literal, and a few metaphorical; but it would take more than a few monster-slayings to bring the town back to normalcy, or as close to normal as possible given the changed circumstances.

Mitch, and CJ, a pair of pre-teen, Gen-Z time travelers came to terms with being stuck in the past until time caught up to 2023. CJ had the foresight to prepare a makeshift camp for them over the past week. They decided to abandon the Hopper cabin to allow Hopper and Eleven to occupy it in-time for Christmas. Faced with a coming cold winter, CJ and Mitch expanded their makeshift camp into a small hut, where they holed up for the next few months.

They argued a lot over the fate of Adult Will Byers: CJ pointed out that keeping a grown man hostage indefinitely was a nonstarter; Mitch argued that he would need to remain in captivity so he can be exorcised so that the closing of the gate in 1984 won't kill him. It was funny how much the events of the past week mirrored so many classic movies their parents loved.

They eventually compromised and returned to lying low in their hastily constructed hovel. CJ's resourcefulness eventually allowed them to expand it into a cottage, furnish it with electronics, and hook it up to solar power.

As for the younger Will, the trauma of that week in Fall 1983 would haunt him for the rest of his life. He got his friends back, especially Mike; but Mike seemed preoccupied with some new personal issues.

Oh well. At least anything else was better than being in that hellish place, on the run, for one week. That was until a coughing fit on Christmas momentarily gave him a hellish vision of the Upside Down. That vision would lead to the events of 1984

Lucas never truly got over being passed over for a new girl. He and Mike would fight a lot over the coming months over the dumbest things; but things never again got as bad as that day in the Junkyard. His story proceeded as history had intended it.

Nothing much really changed in Mike's story. He met, and lost the love of his life in the same week; he got his first kiss and his first, sort-of, break-up in the same hour. How does one recover from that? Never.

However, he now knew there were at least two super-powered girls out there. He refused to believe El was dead; then he began calling her by supercomm every night in a vigil lasting the good part of the next year.

Dustin returned to a ewgular nerd's life with his mom; the pussy daddy, ok that came out wrong, kitty daddy to Mews.

side Down, it seethed with rage, Unlike Mike and Eleven, Nancy and Jonathan took longer than a week to establish a meaningful bond.

CJ swore she would force feed her would-be parents nougat if that's what it took to get them together and stay there.

Eventually, to CJ's frustration. Jonathan opted to ignore the whole week in 1983 and began to distance himself from Nancy which was not exactly an easy task when his little brother, and her little brother were joined at the hip.

Nancy would get back with Steve, in spite of many reservations and persistent Barb-related flashbacks.

They would have an outwardly normal relationship for several months before the weight of Barb's death and the burden of pretending split them both back up again

The cottage Mitch and CJ shared would slowly expand from a hovel

to a cabin, then to a two-storey with a secret basement for their work as Time Agents. They would never see 2023 as 12-year olds again. CZJ would tragically be in her 30s by the time she sees Netflix again; a bit older before she finally sees Hamilton off-Broadway (she bought tickets early before it became a runaway hit. . and in her 50s by the time she finishes Troll Hunters.

IN THE UPSIDE-DOWN

Not all was well, though. In the bowels of the hellish dimension known to certain residents of Hawkins as the Upside Down, it seethed with rage. It had tried winning the easy way: by trying to cut the Crucial String that portended its demise. It was foiled, yet again, by children.

No matter, though. It had forty years of knowledge to work with to once again take over that other world. Cutting the crucial string didn't work out; it seemed the forces of destiny were too strong to keep Mike and Eleven apart. However.... the Gate was still open, and the Mind Flayer had its spy in place. It can't sever the Crucial String; so it might as well fray at its ends. Only then, when it was finally undone, will it have the free hand (or hands, rather) it needs to spin its own web on the surface world.